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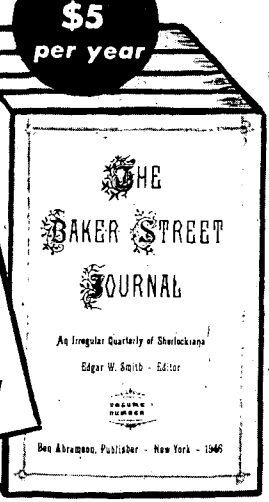

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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by DOROTHY B. HUGHES

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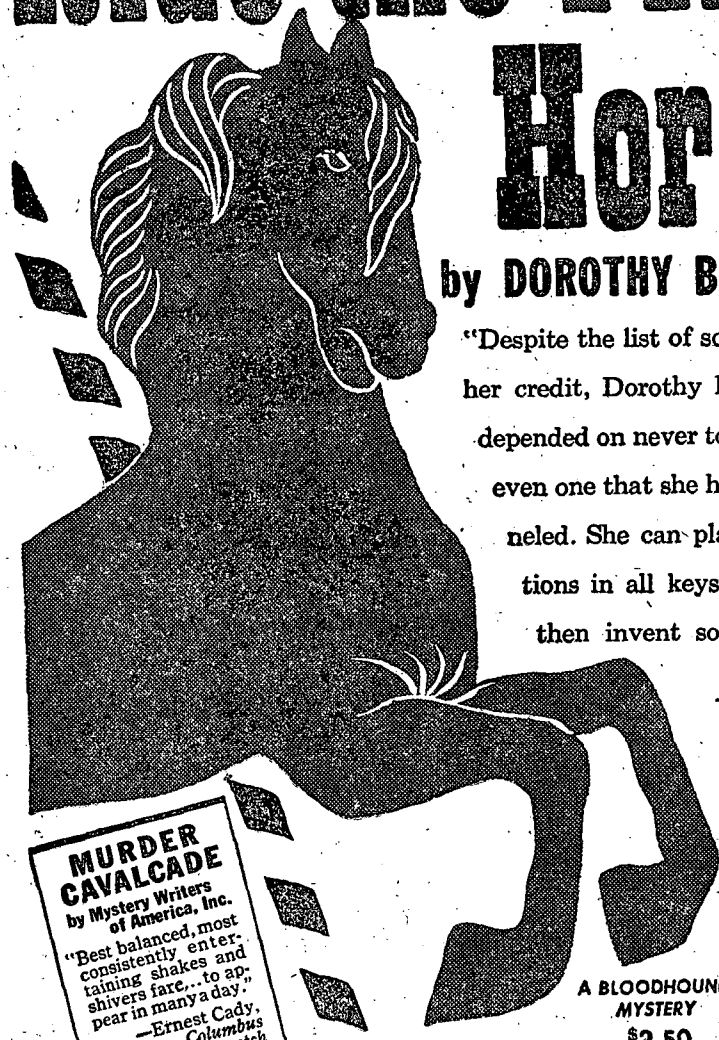

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YOURS FOR THE UNMASKING!

Beginning with this issue we inaugurate a new series of EQMM Prize Contests. Up to this time all EQMM contests have been annual events held exclusively for writers — to stimulate the writing of the very finest short stories in the detective-crime field. Now we start a series of monthly prize contests planned exclusively for readers and calculated to give all EQMM fans an opportunity to combine pleasure with business — the pleasure of reading the work of a famous detective-story writer and the business of being paid to do it! Here's the set-up: We have asked Clayton Rawson to write a series of short-shorts about his celebrated magician detective, the Great Merlini. We publish these brand-new stories in successive issues of EQMM — but each one without the solution. At the moment in each story where the Great Merlini says he now knows the answer, we stop the story and give you the chance to figure out the solution for yourself. Then all you have to do is write out the answer and submit it to us for monthly cash prizes. Each month, as long as the contests continue, we will award $250 in prizes for the 31 best solutions — $100 for First Prize, and 30 additional prizes of $5 each; and in the case of ties, of course, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

The awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — which means (1) on the accuracy of your solution, and (2) on the simplicity, clarity, and soundness of your reasoning. You may typewrite your answer or write it in longhand — every submission from every reader will have an equal chance to win. We guarantee that every entry will be given personal consideration by the judges, the editorial staff of EQMM; on the other hand, we cannot undertake to return any submissions, and the decisions of the judges, it is agreed, will be accepted by all contestants as final.

The problems in Mr. Rawson's short-shorts have been devised with extraordinary care. They are not too difficult to solve, yet they are not too easy. You do not have to be a mastermind to deduce the correct answer, nor are the puzzles mere child's-play. Even more important, the solutions are not complicated: each solution can be clearly explained in 100 words or less — indeed, we recommend strongly that you limit your solution to 50-to-100 words.

The series starts with a murder case titled " The Clue of the Tat-

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tooed Man." In order to publish the names of the winners as quickly as possible, your answers must reach Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, New York, no later than December 10, 1946. This will give us barely enough time to announce the winners of the first contest in our February 1947 issue, which goes on sale early in January 1947. Thereafter, for as long as we keep the monthly contests running, the names of the prize-winners will be published monthly. With the names of each set of winners we shall also print the author's own solution.

One paragraph more of your time before you plunge into the first prize-contest story: we cannot refrain from telling you how happy we are to have persuaded Clayton Rawson to write these stories for us and to revolve them around his deductive wonder-worker, the Great Merlini. Clayton Rawson is one of the topflight mystifiers in the whole bloodhound business. Author, you will remember, of those excellent novels, DEATH FROM A TOP HAT, THE FOOTPRINTS ON THE CEILING, THE HEADLESS LADY, *and* NO COFFIN FOR THE CORPSE, *Mr. Rawson is a favorite with plain fans and fancy connoisseurs alike. John Dickson Carr has rated him one of the six front-rank detective-story writers among contemporary Americans — high praise from an acknowledged master, but richly deserved.*

And now, read "The Clue of the Tattooed Man," beat the Great Merlini himself to the punch, and mail your solution pronto. Hurry, hurry, hurry — $250 in cash will be sent to those of you who, in the opinion of the judges, prove yourselves the best Armchair Detectives. And if you do not succeed in the first monthly contest, try, try again — there will be another contest-story in the next issue (January 1947, on sale early in December 1946), with cash prizes again totaling $250.

Good luck to you all!

THE CLUE OF THE TATTOOED MAN

by CLAYTON RAWSON

THE GREAT MERLINI looked at his watch for the umpteenth time just as Inspector Gavigan's car pulled up before the Hotel Astor.

"I've got a good notion to turn you into a rabbit," the magician said as he got in. "I've been waiting here for you ever since eleven o'clock."

"You're a mindreader," Gavigan said in a tired voice. "You should know why we're late."

"I see," Merlini said. "Murder."

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"I've seen you make better guesses," Gavigan said gloomily. "It's murder, all right. But it's also attempted suicide, a gambling charge, a vanishing man, a nine-foot giant, a. . . ." His voice trailed off as though he didn't believe it himself.

"And dope, too," Merlini said. "Gavigan, you've been hitting the pipe."

The inspector growled. "Brady, you tell him. I'm a nervous wreck."

Brady seemed just as glum. "Well, it's like this. We get a phone call at 11:40 from a guy who says his wife has been murdered. He's in a phone booth in the lobby near the Garden. We step on the gas getting up there because he sounds like he might have suicide in mind. He does. We find a commotion in the drug store off the lobby and the druggist is scrapping with a tall, skinny guy who bought a bottle of sleeping tablets and then started to eat them like they was peanuts. So we send the Professor down to Bellevue to keep a date with a stomach pump."

"A Professor?" Merlini asked. "What of — romance languages, mathematics, nuclear physics — ?"

"I never heard any worse guesses," Brady replied. "His name's Professor Vox. The circus opened at the Garden this week and he's a ventriloquist in the sideshow. So we go upstairs and before we can get into room 816 where the body is we have to wade through a crap game that is going on in the corridor outside — a cowboy, a juggler and three acrobats. I know then I won't like the case and a minute later I'm positive — the ventriloquist's wife is a snake-charmer. And she has been strangled with a piece of cloth a foot wide and about twenty feet long."

"And that," Merlini put in, "gives you a Hindu as a suspect."

"Wrong again. It's a turban all right, but it belongs to a little fat guy who is billed as Mohammed the Magician but whose real name is Jimmy O'Reilly and who makes up like a Hindu with greasepaint. What's more, he has taken it on the lam and so we figure as soon as we catch him the case is solved. But then we question the crap players. And we find that their game starts at 11 P.M., that Zelda, the Snake-charmer, goes into her room a few minutes later and that the magician never goes near her room at all."

"Maybe," Merlini said, producing a lighted cigarette from thin air, "he was already there — waiting."

"I hope not because this is on the eighth floor, the only window is locked on the inside, the crap players insist he didn't leave by the only door, and the only way out is to vanish into thin air."

"It's a good trick," Merlini said noncommittally. "If you can do it."

"Yeah," Brady went on even more glumly. "And pinning it on him in court would be a good trick too because what happens next is that the crap players all agree there was one guy who went into the murder room between the time they last saw the

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snake-charmer and the time we show up. He went in at 11:15, stays for maybe ten minutes, and comes out again. They swear his identification is a cinch because his face looks like a crazyquilt. He is Tinto — The Tattooed Man.

"And he's also missing. We send out a call to have him picked up. And while we wait we turn up two more hot suspects — both guys who are scared to death of snakes and hate the snake-charmer because she sometimes gets funny and leaves a snake or two in their rooms for a joke. They both look like I feel at this point — definitely not normal. One is Major Little, a midget who is almost so small he could have walked past that crap game without being noticed — only not quite. The other is a guy who is about as noticeable as an elephant; he's a beefy nine-foot giant named Goliath.

"So now we got murder, attempted suicide, a crap game, a vanishing magician, two freaks with motives and no alibis — they claim they were asleep — and a walking picture gallery who is the only guy who could have done it. Two minutes later Tinto walks in — a tall, underfed-looking egg with a face like a WPA post-office mural. And he says he had a date to meet Zelda in front of the Hotel Astor at a quarter to eleven and waited there over an hour — only she didn't show up. He can't prove it and four witnesses say different. So we charge him."

"Well," Merlini said, "your excuse for keeping me waiting is one I haven't heard before — I'll give you that. There's one little thing I don't like about it though."

"One little thing!" Gavigan exploded. "My God! All of it is —" He stopped abruptly. "Okay, I'll bite. What didn't you like?"

"Your skepticism concerning Tinto's story. I think he *was* in front of the Hotel Astor at the time of the murder — just as he claims."

"Oh, you do, do you?" Gavigan said darkly. Then suddenly he blinked. "So that's it! Now we got a magician as a material witness. *You* saw him there at the time of the murder — while you were waiting for me."

Merlini nodded. "Yes, I did. But why so unhappy about it? That should tell you who killed Zelda. It's obvious that . . ."

Who do you think murdered Zelda the Snake-Charmer? Was it
Tinto the Tattooed Man
Professor Vox the Ventriloquist
Mohammed the Magician
Major Little the Midget
Goliath the Giant
And what are your reasons?
Mail your solution at once to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, New York.

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One of the supreme thrills of editing is to make a "discovery," and one of the supreme types of "discovery" is to find an old story that no one has ever heard of and that the author himself (or herself) has quite probably forgotten all about. And when that forgotten, neglected, unhonored story turns out to be one involving a famous detective, when it proves to be an unknown tale in a well-known series, then the thrill of "discovery" is comparable only to that frisson d'extase *which shakes the soul and body of a book collector who has just laid trembling fingers on a volume he has sought in vain for half a lifetime.*

Our record for "discoveries" has been full enough to satisfy the most gluttonous gourmand of gore and grue—"good measure . . . and running over." Many of those discoveries we have already passed on to readers of EQMM and EQ-anthologies. Gourmets of EQMM will recall E. C. Bentley's "The Ministering Angel," about detective Philip Trent, miraculously and mysteriously left out of the only book of Trent shorts, TRENT INTERVENES; *Jacques Futrelle's "The Stolen Rubens," about Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, not included either in* THE THINKING MACHINE *or* THE THINKING MACHINE ON THE CASE; *the two Hercule Poirot stories which have never appeared in any of Agatha Christie's books; the five Campion short stories that Margery Allingham omitted from* MR. CAMPION: CRIMINOLOGIST *and* MR. CAMPION AND OTHERS; *and the other four-leaf clovers of ferretry that have neoned the pages of EQMM from issue to issue.*

And now we bring you another lost treasure.

Agatha Christie's THE MYSTERIOUS MR. QUIN *contains twelve short stories of which nine are detective-crime and three are supernatural. The book was published in 1930, both in England and the United States, and the text of both editions, except for a slight rearrangement in the sequence of the stories, is identical. Until a short time ago we believed that Agatha Christie had written only twelve tales about Mr. Quin and Mr. Satterthwaite, who are not only colleagues in crime detection but, in a strange sort of way, are "Watsons" to each other. Lo and behold, we recently discovered a thirteenth tale—one published in "Flynn's Weekly" four years before the book about Mr. Quin was published and yet not included in that book!*

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And to add titillation to the thrill of discovery, the thirteenth tale is one of the best stories Agatha Christie wrote about the mystic Mr. Quin and the sedentary Mr. Satterthwaite!

We do not often quote from a publisher's jacket blurb but in this instance we cannot do better than borrow the English publisher's dust-wrapper introduction of the Satterthwaite-Quin partnership: "Mr. Satterthwaite is a dried-up elderly little man who has never known romance or adventure himself. He is a looker-on at life. But he feels an increasing desire to play a part in the drama of other people — especially is he drawn to mysteries of unsolved crimes. And here he has a helper — the mysterious Mr. Quin — the man who appears from nowhere — who 'comes and goes' like the invisible Harlequin of old. Who is Mr. Quin? No one knows, but he is one who 'speaks for the dead who cannot speak for themselves,' and he is also the friend of lovers. Prompted by his mystic influence, Mr. Satterthwaite plays a real part in life at last, and unravels mysteries that seem incapable of solution."

Meet one of Agatha Christie's most delightful duos — the love detectives — in a hitherto unknown tale from the typewriter of an acknowledged contemporary mistress of manhunting . . .

THE LOVE DETECTIVES

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

LITTLE MR. SATTERTHWAITE looked thoughtfully across at his host. The friendship between these two men was an odd one. The colonel was a simple country gentleman whose passion in life was sport. The few weeks that he spent perforce in London, he spent unwillingly. Mr. Satterthwaite, on the other hand, was a town bird. He was an authority on French cooking, on ladies' dress, and on all the latest scandals. His passion was observing human nature, and he was an expert in his own special line —that of an onlooker at life.

It would seem, therefore, that he and Colonel Melrose would have little in common, for the colonel had no interest in his neighbors' affairs, and a horror of any kind of emotion. The two men were friends mainly because their fathers before them had been friends. Also they knew the same people, and had reactionary views about *nouveaux riches*.

It was about half-past seven. The two men were sitting in the colonel's comfortable study, and Melrose was

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describing a run of the previous winter with a keen hunting man's enthusiasm. Mr. Satterthwaite, whose knowledge of horses consisted chiefly of the time honored Sunday morning visit to the stables which still obtains in old-fashioned country houses, listened with his invariable politeness.

The sharp ringing of the telephone interrupted Melrose. He crossed to the table and took up the receiver.

"Hell, Yes — Colonel Melrose speaking. What's that?"

His whole demeanor altered — became stiff and official. It was the magistrate speaking now, not the sportsman.

He listened for some moments, then said laconically:

"Right, Curtis. I'll be over at once."

He replaced the receiver and turned to his guest.

"Sir James Dwighton has been found in his library — murdered."

"What?"

Mr. Satterthwaite was startled — thrilled.

"I must go over to Alderway at once. Care to come with me?"

Mr. Satterthwaite remembered that the colonel was chief constable of the county.

"If I shan't be in the way —" He hesitated.

"Not at all. That was Inspector Curtis telephoning. Good honest fellow, but no brains. I'd be glad if you would come with me, Satterthwaite. I've got an idea this is going to turn out a nasty business."

"Have they got the fellow who did it?"

"No," replied Melrose, shortly.

Mr. Satterthwaite's trained ear detected a *nuance* of reserve behind the curt negative. He began to go over in his mind all that he knew of the Dwightons.

A pompous old fellow, the late Sir James, brusque in his manner. A man that might easily make enemies. Veering on sixty, with grizzled hair and a florid face. Reputed to be tightfisted in the extreme.

His mind went on to Lady Dwighton. Her image floated before him, young, auburn haired, slender. He remembered various rumors, hints, odd bits of gossip. So that was it — that was why Melrose looked so glum. Then he pulled himself up — his imagination was running away with him.

Five minutes later Mr. Satterthwaite took his place beside his host in the latter's little two seater, and they drove off together into the night.

The colonel was a taciturn man. They had gone quite a mile and a half before he spoke. Then he jerked out abruptly:

"You know 'em, I suppose?"

"The Dwightons? I know all about them, of course." Who was there Mr. Satterthwaite didn't know all about? "I've met him once, I think, and her rather oftener."

"Pretty woman," said Melrose.

"Beautiful!" declared Mr. Satterthwaite.

"Think so?"

"A pure Renaissance type," de-

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clared Mr. Satterthwaite, warming up to his theme. "She acted in those theatricals — the charity *matineé,* you know, last spring. I was very much struck. Nothing modern about her — a pure survival. One can imagine her in the Doge's palace, or Lucretia Borgia."

The colonel let the car swerve slightly, and Mr. Satterthwaite came to an abrupt stop. He wondered what fatality had brought the name of Lucretia Borgia to his tongue. Under the circumstances —

"Dwighton was not poisoned, was he?" he asked abruptly.

Melrose looked at him sideways, somewhat curiously.

"Why do you ask that, I wonder?" he said.

"Oh, I — I don't know." Mr. Satterthwaite was flustered. "I — it just occurred to me."

"Well, he wasn't," said Melrose gloomily. "If you want to know, he was crashed on the head."

"With a blunt instrument," murmured Mr. Satterthwaite, nodding his head sagely.

"Dont talk like a damned detective story, Satterthwaite. He was hit on the head with a bronze figure."

"Oh," said Satterthwaite, and relapsed into silence.

"Know anything of a chap called Paul Delangua?" asked Melrose after a minute or two.

"Yes. Good-looking young fellow."

"I dare say women would call him so," growled the colonel.

"You don't like him?"

"No, I don't."

"I should have thought you would have. He rides very well."

"Like a foreigner at the horse show. Full of monkey tricks."

Mr. Satterthwaite suppressed a smile. Poor old Melrose was so very British in his outlook. Agreeably conscious himself of a cosmopolitan point of view, Mr. Satterthwaite was able to deplore the insular attitude toward life.

"Has he been down in this part of the world?" he asked.

"He's been staying at Alderway with the Dwighton's. The rumor goes that Sir James kicked him out a week ago."

"Why?"

"Found him making love to his wife, I suppose. What the hell —"

There was a violent swerve, and a jarring impact.

"Most dangerous crossroads in England," said Melrose. "All the same, the other fellow should have sounded his horn. We're on the main road. I fancy we've damaged him rather more than he has damaged us."

He sprang out. A figure alighted from the other car and joined him. Fragments of speech reached Satterthwaite.

"Entirely my fault, I'm afraid," the stranger was saying. "But I do not know this part of the country very well, and there's absolutely no sign of any kind to show you're coming onto the main road."

The colonel, mollified, rejoined

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suitably. The two men bent together over the stranger's car which a chauffeur was already examining. The conversation became highly technical.

"A matter of half an hour, I'm afraid," said the stranger. "But don't let me detain you. I'm glad your car escaped injury as well as it did."

"As a matter of fact—" the colonel was beginning, but he was interrupted.

Mr. Satterthwaite, seething with excitement, hopped out of the car with a birdlike action, and seized the stranger warmly by the hand.

"It *is!* I thought I recognized the voice," he declared excitedly. "What an extraordinary thing. What a very extraordinary thing."

"Eh?" said Colonel Melrose.

"Mr. Harley Quin. Melrose, I'm sure you've heard me speak many times of Mr. Quin?"

Colonel Melrose did not seem to remember the fact, but he assisted politely at the scene while Mr. Satterthwaite was chirrupping gayly on.

"I haven't seen you—let me see—"

"Since the night at the Bells and Motley," said the other quietly.

"The Bells and Motley, eh?" said the colonel.

"An inn," explained Mr. Satterthwaite.

"What an odd name for an inn."

"Only an old one," said Mr. Quin. "There was a time, remember, when Bells and Motley were more common in England than they are nowadays."

"I suppose so; yes, no doubt you are right," said Melrose vaguely.

He blinked. By a curious effect of light—the headlights of one car and the red taillight of the other—Mr. Quin seemed for a moment to be dressed in motley himself. But it was only the light.

"We can't leave you here stranded on the road," continued Mr. Satterthwaite. "You must come along with us. There's plenty of room for three, isnt there, Melrose?"

"Oh, rather."

But the colonel's voice was a little doubtful.

"The only thing is," he remarked, "the job we're on. Eh, Satterthwaite?"

Mr. Satterthwaite stood stock still. Ideas leaped and flashed over him. He positively shook with excitement.

"No," he cried. "No, I should have known better! There is no chance where you are concerned, Mr. Quin. It was not an accident that we all met tonight at the crossroads."

Colonel Melrose stared at his friend in astonishment. Mr. Satterthwaite took him by the arm.

"You remember what I told you—about our friend Derek Capel? The motive for his suicide, which no one could guess? It was Mr. Quin who solved that problem—and there have been other since. He shows you things that are there all the time, but which you haven't seen. He's marvelous."

"My dear Satterthwaite, you are making me blush," said Mr. Quin, smiling. "As far as I can remember,

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these discoveries were all made by you, not by me."

"They were made because you were there," said Mr. Satterthwaite with intense conviction.

"Well," said Colonel Melrose, clearing his throat uncomfortably. "We mustn't waste any more time. Let's get on."

He climbed into the driver's seat He was not too well pleased at having the stranger foisted upon him through Mr. Satterthwaite's enthusiasm, but he had no valid objection to offer, and he was anxious to get on to Alderway as fast as possible.

Mr. Satterthwaite urged Mr. Quin in next, and himself took the outside seat. The car was a roomy one, and took three without undue squeezing.

"So you are interested in crime, Mr. Quin?" said the colonel, doing his best to be genial.

"No, not exactly in crime."

"What, then?"

Mr. Quin smiled.

"Let us ask Mr. Satterthwaite. He is a very shrewd observer."

"I think," said Satterthwaite slowly, "I may be wrong, but I think — that Mr. Quin is interested in — lovers."

He blushed as he said the last word, which is one no Englishman can pronounce without self-consciousness. Mr. Satterthwaite brought it out apologetically, and with an effect of inverted commas.

"By gad!" said the colonel, startled and silenced.

He reflected inwardly that this seemed to be a very rum friend of Satterthwaite's. He glanced at him sideways. The fellow looked all right — quite a normal young chap. Rather dark, but not at all foreign-looking.

"And now," said Satterthwaite importantly, "I must tell you all about the case."

He talked for some ten minutes. Sitting there in the darkness, rushing through the night, he had an intoxicating feeling of power. What did it matter if he were only a looker-on at life? He had words at his command, he was master of them, he could string them to a pattern — a strange Renaissance pattern composed of the beauty of Laura Dwighton, with her white arms and red hair — and the shadowy dark figure of Paul Delangua, whom women found handsome.

Set that against the background of Alderway — Alderway that had stood since the days of Henry VII, and some said before that. Alderway that was English to the core, with its clipped yew, and its old beak barn and the fish pond, where monks had kept their carp for Fridays.

In a few deft strokes he had etched in Sir James, a Dwighton who was a true descendant of the old De Wittons, who long ago had wrung money out of the land and locked it fast in coffers, so that whoever else had fallen on evil days, the masters of Alderway had never become impoverished.

At last Mr. Satterthwaite ceased. He was sure, had been sure all along, of the sympathy of his audience. He

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waited now the word of praise which was his due. It came.

"You are an artist, Mr. Satterthwaite."

"I — I do my best." The little man was suddenly humble.

They had turned in at the lodge gates some minutes ago. Now the car drew up in front of the doorway, and a police constable came hurriedly down the steps to meet them.

"Good evening, sir. Inspector Curtis is in the library."

"Right."

Melrose ran up the steps followed by the other two. As the three of them passed across the wide hall, an elderly butler peered from a doorway apprehensively. Melrose nodded to him.

"Evening, Miles. This is a sad business."

"It is, indeed," the other quavered. "I can hardly believe it, sir; indeed I can't. To think that anyone should strike down the master."

"Yes, yes," said Melrose, cutting him short. "I'll have a talk with you presently."

He strode on to the library. There a big, soldierly-looking inspector greeted him with respect.

"Nasty business, sir. I have not disturbed things. No fingerprints on the weapon. Whoever did it knew his business."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked at the bowed figure sitting at the big writing table, and looked hurriedly away again. The man had been struck down from behind, a smashing blow that had crashed in the skull. The sight was not a pretty one.

The weapon lay on the floor — a bronze figure about two feet high, the base of it stained and wet. Mr. Satterthwaite bent over it curiously.

"A Venus," he said softly. "So he was struck down by Venus."

He found food for poetic meditation in the thought.

"The windows," said the inspector, "were all closed and bolted on the inside."

He paused significantly.

"Making an inside job of it," said the chief constable reluctantly. "Well — well, we'll see."

The murdered man was dressed in plus fours, and a bag of golf clubs had been flung untidily across a big leather couch.

"Just come in from the links," explained the inspector, following the chief constable's glance. "At five-fifteen, that was. Had tea brought here by the butler. Later he rang for his valet to bring him down a pair of soft slippers. As far as we can tell, the valet was the last person to see him alive."

Melrose nodded, and turned his attention once more to the writing table.

A good many of the ornaments had been overturned and broken. Prominent among these was a big dark enamel clock, which lay on its side in the very center of the table.

The inspector cleared his throat.

"That's what you might call a piece of luck, sir," he said. "As you see,

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it's stopped. *At half-past six*. That gives us the time of the crime. Very convenient."

The colonel was staring at the clock.

"As you say," he remarked. "Very convenient." He paused a minute, and then added: "Too damned convenient! I don't like it, inspector."

He looked around at the other two. His eye sought Mr. Quin's with a look of appeal in it.

"Damn it all," he said. "It's too neat. You know what I mean. Things don't happen like that."

"You mean," murmured Mr. Quin, "that clocks don't fall like that?"

Melrose stared at him for a moment, then back at the clock, which had that pathetic and innocent look familiar to objects which have been suddenly bereft of their dignity. Very carefully Colonel Melrose replaced it on its legs again. He struck the table a violent blow. The clock rocked, but it did not fall. Melrose repeated the action, and very slowly, with a kind of unwillingness, the clock fell over on its back.

"What time was the crime discovered?" demanded Melrose sharply.

"Just about seven o'clock, sir."

"Who discovered it?"

"The butler."

"Fetch him in," said the chief constable. "I'll see him now. Where is Lady Dwighton, by the way?"

"Lying down, sir. Her maid says that she's prostrated and can't see anyone."

Melrose nodded, and Inspector Curtis went in search of the butler. Mr. Quin was looking thoughtfully into the fireplace. Mr. Satterthwaite followed his example. He blinked at the smoldering logs for a minute or two, and then something bright caught his eye lying in the grate. He stopped and picked up a little sliver of curved glass.

"You wanted me, sir?"

It was the butler's voice, still quavering and uncertain. Mr. Satterthwaite slipped the fragment of glass into his waistcoat pocket and turned round.

The old man was standing in the doorway.

"Sit down," said the chief constable kindly. "You're shaking all over. It's been a shock to you, I expect."

"It has indeed, sir."

"Well, I shan't keep you long. Your master came in just after five, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. He ordered tea to be brought to him here. Afterward, when I came to take it away, he asked for Jennings to be sent to him — that's his valet, sir."

"What time was that?"

"About ten minutes past six, sir."

"Yes — well?"

"I sent word to Jennings, sir. And it wasn't till I came in here to shut the windows and draw the curtains at seven o'clock that I saw —"

Melrose cut him short.

"Yes, yes, you needn't go into all that. You didn't touch the body, or

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disturb anything, did you?"

"Oh! No indeed, sir! I went as fast as I could go to the telephone to ring up the police."

"And then?"

"I told Janet — her ladyship's maid, sir — to break the news to her ladyship."

"You haven't seen your mistress at all this evening?"

Colonel Melrose put the question casually enough, but Mr. Satterthwaite's keen ears caught anxiety behind the words.

"Not to speak to, sir. Her ladyship has remained in her own apartments since the tragedy."

"Did you see her before?"

The question came sharply, and everyone in the room noted the hesitation before the butler replied.

"I — I just caught a glimpse of her, sir, descending the staircase."

"Did she come in here?"

Mr. Satterthwaite held his breath.

"I — I think so, sir."

"What time was that?"

You might have heard a pin drop. Did the old man know, Mr. Satterthwaite wondered, what hung on his answer?

"It was just upon half-past six, sir."

Colonel Melrose drew a deep breath.

"That will do, thank you. Just send Jennings, the valet, to me, will you?"

Jennings answered the summons with promptitude. A narrow-faced man with a catlike tread. Something sly and secretive about him.

A man thought Mr. Satterthwaite, *who would easily murder his master if he could be sure of not being found out.*

He listened eagerly to the man's answers to Colonel Melrose's questions. But his story seemed straightforward enough. He had brought his master down some soft hide slippers and removed the brogues.

"What did you do after that, Jennings?"

"I went back to the stewards' room, sir."

"At what time did you leave your master?"

"It must have been just after a quarter past six, sir."

"Where were you at half-past six, Jennings?"

"In the stewards' room, sir."

Colonel Melrose dismissed the man with a nod. He looked across at Curtis inquiringly.

"Quite correct, sir, I checked that up. He was in the stewards' room from about six twenty until seven o'clock."

"Then that lets him out," said the chief constable a trifle regretfully. "Besides, there's no motive."

They looked at each other.

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," said the colonel.

A scared-looking lady's maid appeared.

"If you please, her ladyship has heard that Colonel Melrose is here and she would like to see him."

"Certainly," said Melrose. "I'll

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come at once. Will you show me the way?"

But a hand pushed the girl aside. A very different figure now stood in the doorway. Laura Dwighton looked like a visitor from another world.

She was dressed in a clinging medieval tea gown of dull blue brocade. Her auburn hair parted in the middle and brought down over her ears. Conscious of the fact she had a style of her own, Lady Dwighton had never had her hair shingled. It was drawn back into a simple knot in the nape of her neck. Her arms were bare.

One of them was outstretched to steady herself against the frame of the doorway, the other hung down by her side, clasping a book. *She looked,* Mr. Satterthwaite thought, *like a Madonna from an early Italian canvas.*

She stood there, swaying slightly from side to side. Colonel Melrose sprang toward her.

"I've come to tell you — to tell you —"

Her voice was low and rich. Mr. Satterthwaite was so entranced with the dramatic value of the scene that he had forgotten its reality.

"Please, Lady Dwighton —"

Melrose had an arm round her, supporting her. He took her across the hall into a small anteroom, its walls hung with faded silk. Quin and Satterthwaite followed. She sank down on the low settee, her head resting back on a rust-colored cushion, her eyelids closed. The three men watched her. Suddenly she opened her eyes and sat up. She spoke very quietly:

"*I killed him,*" she said. "That's what I came to tell you. *I killed him!*"

There was a moment's agonized silence. Mr. Satterthwaite's heart missed a beat.

"Lady Dwighton," said Melrose. "You've had a great shock — you're unstrung. I don't think you quite know what you're saying."

Would she draw back now — while there was yet time?

"I know perfectly what I'm saying. It was I who shot him."

Two of the men in the room gasped, the other made no sound. Laura Dwighton leaned still farther forward.

"Don't you understand? I came down and shot him. I admit it."

The book she had been holding in her hand clattered to the floor. There was a paper cutter in it, a thing shaped like a dagger with a jeweled hilt. Mr. Satterthwaite picked it up mechanically and placed it on the table. As he did so he thought: *That's a dangerous toy. You could kill a man with that.*

"Well —" Laura Dwighton's voice was impatient — "what are you going to do about it? Arrest me? Take me away?"

Colonel Melrose found his voice with difficulty.

"What you have told me is very serious, Lady Dwighton. I must ask

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you to go to your room till I have — er — made arrangements."

She nodded and rose to her feet. She was quite composed now, grave and cold.

As she turned toward the door, Mr. Quin spoke: "What did you do with the revolver, Lady Dwighton?"

A flicker of uncertainty passed across her face.

"I — I dropped it there on the floor. No, I think I threw it out of the window — oh! I can't remember now. What does it matter? I hardly knew what I was doing. It doesn't matter, does it?"

"No," said Mr. Quin. "I hardly think it matters."

She looked at him in perplexity with a shade of something that might have been alarm. Then she flung back her head and went imperiously out of the room. Mr. Satterthwaite hastened after her. She might, he felt, collapse at any minute. But she was already halfway up the staircase, displaying no sign of her earlier weakness. The scared-looking maid was standing at the foot of the stairway, and Mr. Satterthwaite spoke to her authoritatively:

"Look after your mistress," he said.

"Yes, sir." The girl prepared to ascend after the blue-robed figure. "Oh, please sir, they don't suspect him, do they?"

"Suspect whom?"

"Jennings, sir. Oh! Indeed, sir he wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Jennings? No, of course, not. Go and look after your mistress."

"Yes, sir."

The girl ran quickly up the staircase. Mr. Satterthwaite returned to the room he had just vacated.

Colonel Melrose was saying heavily:

"Well, I'm jiggered. There's more in this than meets the eye. It — it's like those dashed silly things heroines do in many novels."

"It's unreal," agreed Mr. Satterthwaite. "It's like something on the stage."

Mr. Quin nodded. "Yes, you admire the drama, do you not? You are a man who appreciates good acting when you see it."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked hard at him.

In the silence that followed a far-off sound came to their ears.

"Sounds like a shot," said Colonel Melrose. "One of the keepers, I daresay. That's probably what she heard. Perhaps she went down to see. She wouldn't go close or examine the body. She'd leap at once to the conclusion —"

"Mr. Delangua, sir."

It was the old butler who spoke, standing apologetically in the doorway.

"Eh?" said Melrose. "What's that?"

"Mr. Delangua is here, sir, and would like to speak to you if he may."

Colonel Melrose leaned back in his chair.

"Show him in," he said grimly.

A moment later Paul Delangua

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stood in the doorway. As Colonel Melrose had hinted, there was something un-English about him — the easy grace of his movements, the dark handsome face, the eyes set a little too near together. There hung about him the air of the Renaissance. He and Laura Dwighton suggested the same atmosphere.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Delangua. He made a little theatrical bow.

"I don't know what your business may be, Mr. Delangua," said Colonel Melrose sharply, "but if it is nothing to do with the matter at hand —"

Delangua interrupted him with a laugh.

"On the contrary," he said, "it has everything to do with it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Delangua quietly, "that I have come to give myself up for the murder of Sir James Dwighton."

"You know what you are saying?" said Melrose gravely.

"Perfectly."

The young man's eyes were riveted to the table.

"I dont understand —"

"Why I give myself up? Call it remorse — call it anything you please. I stabbed him right enough — you may be quite sure of that." He nodded toward the table. "You've got the weapon there, I see. A very handy little tool. Lady Dwighton unfortunately left it lying around in a book, and I happened to snatch it up."

"One minute," said Colonel Melrose. "Am I to understand that you admit stabbing Sir James with this?"

He held the dagger aloft.

"Quite right. I stole in through the window, you know. He had his back to me. It was quite easy. I left the same way."

"Through the window?"

"Through the window, of course."

"And what time was this?"

Delangua hesitated.

"Let me see — I was talking to the keeper fellow — that was at a quarter past six. I heard the church tower chime. It must have been — well, say somewhere about half-past."

A grim smile came to the colonel's lips.

"Quite right, young man," he said. "Half-past six was the time. Perhaps you've heard that already? But this is altogether a most peculiar murder!"

"Why?"

"So many people confess to it," said Colonel Melrose.

They heard the sharp intake of the other's breath.

"Who else has confessed to it?" he asked in a voice that he vainly strove to render steady.

"Lady Dwighton."

Delangua threw back his head and laughed in rather a forced manner.

"Lady Dwighton is apt to be hysterical," he said lightly. "I shouldn't pay any attention to what she says if I were you."

"I don't think I shall," said Mel-

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rose. "But there's another odd thing about this murder."

"What's that?"

"Well," said Melrose, "Lady Dwighton has confessed to having shot Sir James, and you have confessed to having stabbed him. But luckily for both of you, he wasn't shot or stabbed, you see. His skull was smashed in."

"My God!" cried Delangua. "But a woman couldn't possibly do that—"

He stopped, biting his lip. Melrose nodded with the ghost of a smile.

"Often read of it," he volunteered. "Never seen it happen."

"What?"

"Couple of young idiots each accusing themselves because they thought the other one had done it," said Melrose. "Now we've got to begin at the beginning."

"The valet," cried Mr. Satterthwaite. "That girl just now—I wasn't paying any attention at the time."

He paused, striving for coherence.

"She was afraid of our suspecting him. There must be some motive that he had and which we don't know, but she does."

Colonel Melrose frowned, then he rang the bell. When it was answered, he said:

"Please ask Lady Dwighton if she will be good enough to come down again?"

They waited in silence until she came. At sight of Delangua she started and stretched out a hand to save herself from falling. Colonel Melrose came quickly to the rescue.

"It's quite all right, Lady Dwighton. Please don't be alarmed."

"I don't understand. What is Mr. Delangua doing here?"

Delangua came over to her.

"Laura—Laura—why did you do it?"

"Do it?"

"I know. It was for me—because you thought that *I*—after all, it was natural, I suppose. But, oh! You angel!"

Colonel Melrose cleared his throat. He was a man who disliked emotion and had a horror of anything approaching a "scene."

"If you'll allow me to say so, Lady Dwighton, both you and Mr. Delangua, have had a lucky escape. He had just arrived in his turn to 'confess' to the murder—oh, it's quite all right, he didn't do it! But what we want to know is the truth. No more shillyshallying. The butler says you went into the library at half-past six—is that so?"

Laura looked at Delangua. He nodded.

"The truth, Laura," he said. "That is what we want now."

She breathed a deep sigh.

"I will tell you."

She sank down on a chair that Mr. Satterthwaite had hurriedly pushed forward.

"I did come down. I opened the library door and I saw—"

She stopped and swallowed. Mr. Satterthwaite leaned forward and

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patted her hand encouragingly.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. You saw?"

"My husband was lying across the writing table. I saw his head — the blood — oh!"

She put her hands to her face. The chief constable leaned forward.

"Excuse me, Lady Dwighton. You thought Mr. Delangua had shot him?"

She nodded.

"Forgive me, Paul," she pleaded. "But you said — you said —"

"That I'd shoot him like a dog," said Delangua grimly. "I remember. That was the day I discovered he'd been ill-treating you."

The chief constable kept sternly to the matter in hand.

"Then I am to understand, Lady Dwighton, that you went upstairs again and — er — said nothing. We needn't go into your reason. You didn't touch the body or go near the writing table?"

She shuddered.

"No, no. I ran straight out of the room."

"I see, I see. And what time was this exactly? Do you know?"

"It was just half-past six when I got back to my bedroom."

"Then at — say five and twenty past six, Sir James was already dead." The chief constable looked at the others. "That clock — it was faked, eh? We suspected that all along. Nothing easier than to move the hands to whatever time you wished, but they made a mistake to lay it down on its side like that. Well, that seems to narrow it down to the butler or the valet, and I can't believe it's the butler. Tell me, Lady Dwighton, did this man Jennings have any grudge against your husband?"

Laura lifted her face from her hands.

"Not exactly a grudge, but — well James told me only this morning that he'd dismissed him. He'd found him pilfering."

"Ah! Now we're getting at it. Jennings would have been dismissed without a character. A serious matter for him."

"You said something about a clock," said Laura Dwighton. "There's just a chance — if you want to fix the time — James would have been sure to have his little golf watch on him. Mightn't that have been smashed too when he fell forward?"

"It's an idea," said the colonel slowly. "But I'm afraid — Curtis!"

The inspector nodded in quick comprehension and left the room. He returned a minute later. On the palm of his hand was a silver watch marked like a golf ball, the kind that are sold for golfers to carry loose in a pocket with balls.

"Here it is, sir," he said, "but I doubt if it will be any good. They're tough, these watches."

The colonel took it from him and held it to his ear.

"It seems to have stopped anyway," he observed.

He pressed with his thumb and the lid of the watch flew open. Inside the glass was cracked across.

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"Ah!" he said exultantly.

The hand pointed to exactly a quarter past six.

"A very good glass of port, Colonel Melrose," said Mr. Quin.

It was half-past nine, and the three men had just finished a belated dinner at Colonel Melrose's house. Mr. Satterthwaite was particularly jubilant.

"I was quite right," he chuckled. "You can't deny it, Mr. Quin. You turned up tonight to save two absurd young people who were both bent on putting their heads into a noose."

"Did I?" said Mr. Quin. "Surely not. I did nothing at all."

"As it turned out, it was not necessary," agreed Mr. Satterthwaite. "But it might have been. It was touch and go, you know. I shall never forget the moment when Lady Dwighton said 'I killed him.' I've never saw anything on the stage half as dramatic."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said Mr. Quin.

"Wouldn't have believed such a thing could happen outside a novel," declared the colonel, for perhaps the twentieth time that night.

"Does it?" asked Mr. Quin.

The colonel stared at him.

"Damn it, it happened tonight."

"Mind you," interposed Mr. Satterthwaite, leaning back and sipping his port. "Lady Dwighton was magnificent, quite magnificent, but she made one mistake. She shouldn't have leaped to the conclusion that her husband had been shot. In the same way Delangua was a fool to assume that he had been stabbed just because the dagger happened to be lying on the table in front of us. It was a mere coincidence that Lady Dwighton should have brought it down with her."

"Was it?" asked Mr. Quin.

"Now if they'd only confined themselves to saying that they'd killed Sir James, without particularizing how—" went on Mr. Satterthwaite—"what would have been the result?"

"They might have been believed," said Mr. Quin with an odd smile.

"The whole thing was exactly like a novel," said the colonel.

"That's where they got the idea from, I daresay," said Mr. Quin.

"Possibly," agreed Mr. Satterthwaite. "Things one has read do come back to one in the oddest way."

He looked across at Mr. Quin.

"Of course," he said. "The clock really looked suspicious from the first. One ought never to forget how easy it is to put the hands of a clock or watch forward or back."

Mr. Quin nodded and repeated the words.

"Forward," he said, and paused. "*Or back.*"

There was something encouraging in his voice. His bright dark eyes were fixed on Mr. Satterthwaite.

"The hands of the clock were put forward," said Mr. Satterthwaite. "We know that."

"Were they?" asked Mr. Quin.

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Mr. Satterthwaite stared at him.

"Do you mean," he said slowly, "that it was the watch which was put back? But that doesn't make sense. It's impossible."

"Not *impossible,*" murmured Mr. Quin.

"Well — absurd. To whose advantage could that be?"

"Only, I suppose, to some one who had an *alibi* for that time."

"By gad!" cried the colonel. "That's the time young Delangua said he was talking to the keeper."

"He told us that very particularly," said Mr. Satterthwaite.

They looked at each other. They had an uneasy feeling as of solid ground failing beneath their feet. Facts went spinning round, turning new and unexpected faces.. And in the center of the kaleidoscope was the dark smiling face of Mr. Quin.

"But in that case —" began Melrose — "in that case —"

Mr. Satterthwaite, nimble witted, finished his sentence for him.

"It's all the other way round. A plant just the same — but a plant against the valet. Oh, but it can't be! It's impossible. Why each of them accused themselves of the crime."

"Yes, said Mr. Quin. "Up till then you suspected them, didn't you?"

His voice went on, placid and dreamy:

"Just like something out of a book, you said, colonel. They got the idea there. It's what the innocent hero and heroine do. Of course it made you think *them* innocent — there was the force of tradition behind them. Mr. Satterthwaite has been saying all along it was like something on the stage. You were both right. *It wasn't real.* You've been saying so all along without knowing what you were saying. They'd have told a much better story than that if they'd *wanted* to be believed."

The two men looked at him helplessly.

"It would be clever," said Mr. Satterthwaite slowly. "It would be diabolically clever. And I've thought of something else. The butler said he went in at seven to shut the windows — so he must have expected them to be open."

"That's the way Delangua came in," said Mr. Quin. "He killed Sir James with one blow, and he and she together did what they had to do — "

He looked at Mr. Satterthwaite, encouraging him to reconstruct the scene. He did so, hesitatingly.

"They smashed the clock and put it on its side. Yes. They altered the watch and smashed it. Then he went out of the window and she fastened it after him. But there's one thing I don't see. Why bother with the watch at all? Why not simply put back the hands of the clock?"

"The clock was always a little obvious," said Mr. Quinn. "Any one might have seen through a rather transparent device like that."

"But surely the watch was too far-fetched. Why, it was pure chance that we ever thought of the watch."

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"Oh, no," said Mr. Quinn. "It was the lady's suggestion, remember."

Mr. Satterthwaite stared at him fascinated.

"And yet, you know," said Mr. Quin dreamily, "the one person who wouldn't be likely to overlook the watch would be the valet. Valets know better than anyone what their masters carry in their pockets. If he altered the clock, the valet would have altered the watch too. They don't understand human nature, those two. They are not like Mr. Satterthwaite."

Mr. Satterthwaite shook his head.

"I was all wrong,' he murmured humbly. "I thought that you had come to save them."

"So I did," said Mr. Quin. "Oh! Not those two — the others. Perhaps you didn't notice the lady's maid? She wasn't wearing blue brocade, or acting a dramatic part. But she's really a very pretty girl, and I think she loves that man Jennings very much. I think that between you you'll be able to save her man from getting hanged."

"We've no proof of any kind," said Colonel Melrose heavily.

Mr. Quin smiled.

"Mr. Satterthwaite has."

"I?"

Mr. Satterthwaite was astonished.

Mr. Quin went on: "You've got a proof that that watch wasn't smashed in Sir James's pocket. You can't smash a watch like that without opening the case. Just try it and see. Some one took the watch out and opened it, set back the hands, smashed the glass, and then shut it and put it back. *They never noticed that a fragment of glass was missing.*"

"Oh!" cried Mr. Satterthwaite. His hand flew to his waistcoat pocket. *He drew out a fragment of curved glass.*

It was his moment.

"With this," said Mr. Satterthwaite importantly, "I shall save a man from death."

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By this time it is common knowledge that Cornell Woolrich and William Irish are one and the same person. What is not common knowledge, however, is the fact that in the 1920's Mr. Woolrich (whose full name, according to the Library of Congress records, is Cornell George Hopley-Woolrich) was one of the white-haired boys of American literature who sipped the cup of fame at an extremely young age. He was only twenty years old and still an undergraduate at Columbia University when his first novel, COVER CHARGE, *was published; and in the following year his* CHILDREN OF THE RITZ *won the $10,000 "College Humor" prize—an auspicious start for any twenty-one-year-old wordmonger.*

About five years later, in 1932, Mr. Woolrich discovered mystery-story writing—"killing them dead instead of marrying them off," and he has been doing that ever since. Exactly what caused Mr. Woolrich to switch from so-called "serious" writing to serious detective-story writing is not clear in your Editor's mind—we suspect it was dat ol' debbil, the law of economics. Now there are literally millions of fans who are not only perfectly satisfied that Mr. Woolrich properly "found himself," but who are equally satisfied to let well enough alone by not probing too deeply into Mr. Woolrich's reasons; and speaking for those millions, and with unabashed selfishness, we hope Mr. Woolrich never has the impulse to switch back to so-called "serious" writing.

"Angel Face" is a typical Woolrich-Irish thriller. It first appeared in "Black Mask" nearly ten years ago and has not been reprinted since. It's the story of Jerry Wheeler, the girl with the face of an angel—Nick Burns, a sentimental dick from Center Street—and the mark just above the hip on Ruby Rose Reading . . .

ANGEL FACE

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

I HAD ON MY best hat and my warpaint when I dug into her bell. You've heard make-up called that a thousand times, but this is one time it rated it; it was just that—warpaint.

I caught Ruby Rose Reading at breakfast time—hers, not mine. Quarter to three in the afternoon. Breakfast was a pink soda-fountain mess, a tomato-and-lettuce, both untouched, and an empty glass of Bromo Seltzer, which had evidently had first claim on her. There were a pair of swell ski slides under her eyes; she was reading Gladys Glad's

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beauty column to try to figure out how to get rid of them before she went out that night and got a couple more. A negro maid had opened the door, and given me a yellowed optic. "Yes ma'am, who do you wish to see?"

"I see her already," I said, "so skip the Morse Code." I went in up to Ruby Rose's ten-yard line. "Wheeler's the name," I said, "Does it mean anything to you?"

"Should it?" She was dark and Salome-ish. She was mean. She was bad medicine. I could see his finish right there, in her eyes. And it hadn't been any fun to dance at Texas Guinan's or Larry Fay's when I was sixteen, to keep him out of the orphan asylum or the reformatory. I hadn't spent most of my young girlhood in a tinseled G-string to have her take apart what I'd built up, just to see what made him tick.

I said, " I don't mind coming right out with it in front of your maid — if you don't."

But evidently she did. Maybe Mandy was on a few other payrolls beside her own. She hit her with the tomato-and-lettuce in the left eye as preamble to the request: "Whaddo I pay you for, anyway? Take Foo-Too around the block a couple of times!"

"I tuk him once already, and he was a good boy," was the weather report she got on this.

"Well, take him again. Maybe you can kid him it's tomorrow already."

Mandy fastened something that looked like the business-end of a floor mop to a leash, went out shaking her head. "You sho didn't enjoy yo'self last night. That Sto'k Club never do agree with you."

As soon as the gallery was out of the way I said. "You lay off my brother!"

She lit a cigarette, nosed the smoke at me. "Well, Gracie Allen, you've come to the wrong place looking for your brother. And, just for the record, what am I supposed to have done to him, cured him of wiping his nose on his sleeve or something?"

"He's been spending dough like wild, dough that doesn't come out of his salary."

"Then where does it come from?" she asked.

"I haven't found out. I hope his firm never does, either." I shifted gears, went into low — when I used to sing "Poor Butterfly" for the customers — but money couldn't have dragged this performance out of me, it came from the heart, without pay. "There's a little girl on our street, oh not much to look at, thinks twelve o'clock's the middle of the night and storks leave babies, but she's ready to take up where I leave off, pinch pennies and squeeze nickels along with him, build him into something, get him somewhere, not spread him all over the landscape. He's just a man, doesn't know what's good for him, doesn't know his bass from his oboe. I can't stand by and watch her chew her heart up. Give her a break, and him, and me. Pick on someone your size, someone that can take it. Have

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your fun and more power to you — but not with all *I've* got!"

She banged her cigarette to death against a tray. "O.K., is the screen test about over? Now, will you get out of here, you ham-actress, and lemme get my massage?" She went over and got the door ready for me. Gave a traffic-cop signal over her shoulder with one thumb. "I've heard of wives pulling this act, and even mothers, and in a pitcher I saw only lately, Camilly it was called, it was the old man. Now it's a sister!" She gave the ceiling the once-over. "What'll they think of next? Send grandma around tomorrow — next week East Lynne. Come on, make it snappy!" she invited, and hitched her elbow at me. If she'd touched me, I think I'd have murdered her.

"If you feel I'm poison, why don't you put it up to your brother?" she signed off. And very low, just before she walloped the door after me: "And see how far you get!"

She was right. I said, "Chick, you're not going to chuck your job, you're not going to Chicago with that dame, are you?"

He looked at me funny and he said, "How did you know?"

"I saw your valise all packed, when I wanted to send one of your suits to the cleaners."

"You ought to be a detective," he said, and he wasn't pally. "O.K.," he said, "now that you mention it," and he went in and he got it to show me — the back of it going out the door. But I got over there to the door before he did, and pulled a Custer's Last Stand. I skipped the verse and went into the patter chorus. And boy did I sell it, without a spot and without a muted trumpet solo either! At the El-Fay in the old days they would have all been crying into their gin and wiring home to mother.

"I'm not asking anything for myself. I'm older than you, Chick, and when a girl says that you've got her down to bedrock. I've been around plenty, and 'around' wasn't pretty. Maybe you think it was fun wrestling my way home each morning at five, and no holds barred, just so — so. . . . Oh, I didn't know why myself sometimes; just so you wouldn't turn out to be another corner lizard, a sharp-shooter, a bum like the rest of them. Chick, you're just a punk of twenty-four, but as far as I'm concerned the sun rises and sets across your shoulders. Me and little Mary Allen, we've been rooting for you all along; what's the matter with her, Chick? Just because her face don't come out of boxes and she doesn't know the right grips, don't pass her by for something that ought to be shampooed out of your hair with gasoline."

But he didn't have an ear for music; the siren song had got to him like Ulysses. And once they hear that. . . . "Get away from the door," he said, way down low. "I never raised a hand to you in my life, I don't want to now."

The last I saw of him he was pass-

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ing the back of his hand slowly up and down his side, like he was ashamed of it; the valise was in the other one. I picked myself up from the opposite side of the foyer where he'd sent me, the place all buckling around me like seen through a sheet of water. I called out after him through the open door: "Don't go, Chick! You're heading straight for the eight-ball! *Don't go to her,* Chick!" The acoustics were swell, every door in the hall opened to get an earful.

He just stood there a split-second without looking back at me, yellow light gushing out at him through the port-hole of the elevator. He straightened his hat, which my chin against his duke had dislodged — and no more Chick.

At about four that morning I was still snivelling into the gin he'd left behind him, and talking to him across the table from me — without getting any answer — when the door-bell rang. I thought it was him for a minute, but it was two other guys. They didn't ask if they could come in; they just went 'way around to the other side of me and then showed me a couple of tin-heeled palms. So I did the coming-in — after them; I lived there, after all.

They looked the place over like they were prospective tenants being shown an apartment. I didn't go for that; detectives belong in the books you read in bed, not in your apartment at four bells, big as life. "Three closets," I mentioned, "and you get a month's concession. I'm not keeping you gentlemen up, am I?"

One of them was kind of pash looking; I mean he'd washed his face lately, and if he'd been the last man in the world, well, all right, maybe I could have overlooked the fact he was a bloodhound on two legs. The other one had a face like one of those cobblestones they dug up off Eighth Avenue when they removed the trolley tracks.

"You're Jerry Wheeler, aren't you?" the first one told me.

"I've known that for twenty-seven years," I said. "What brought the subject up?"

Cobblestone-face said, "Chick Wheeler's sister, that right?"

"I've got a brother and I call him Chick," I consented. "Any ordinance against that?"

The younger one said, "Don't be so hard to handle. You're going to talk to us and like it." He sat down in a chair, cushioned his hands behind his dome. He said, "What time'd he leave here this evening?"

Something warned me, "don't answer that." I said, "I really couldn't say. I'm not a train-despatcher."

"He was going to Chicago with a dame named Ruby Rose Reading; you knew that, didn't you?"

I thought, "I hit the nail on the head, he *did* help himself to his firm's money. Wonder how much he took? Well, I guess I'll have to go back to work again at one of the hot-spots; maybe I can square it for him, pay back a little each week." I kept my

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face steady. I said, "Now, why would he go *anywhere* with anyone with a name like that? It sounds like it came off a bottle of nail-polish. Come to the point, gentlemen — yes. I mean you two. What's he supposed to have done?"

"There's no supposition about what he's done. He went to the Alcazar Arms at eight-fifteen tonight and throttled Ruby Rose Reading to death, Angel Face."

And that was the first time I heard myself called that. I also heard the good-looking one remonstrate: "Aw, don't give it to her that sudden, Coley, she's a girl after all," but it came from 'way far away. I was down around their feet somewhere sniffling into the carpet.

The good-looking one picked me up and straightened me out in a chair. Cobblestone said, "Don't let her fool you, Burnsie, they all pull that collapsible concertina act when they wanna get out of answering questions." He went into the bedroom and I could hear him pulling out bureau drawers and rummaging around.

I got up on one elbow. I said, "Burns, he didn't do it! *Please,* he didn't do it! All right, I did know about her. He was sold on her. That's why he couldn't have done it. Don't you see, you don't kill the thing you love?"

He just kind of looked at me. "You go to bat for the thing you love too," he murmured. He said, "I've been on the squad eight years now. We never in all that time caught a guy as dead to rights as your brother. He showed up with his valise in the foyer of the Alcazar at exactly twelve minutes past eight tonight. He said to the doorman, 'What time is it? Did Miss Reading send her baggage down yet? We've got to make a train.' Well, she had sent her baggage down, and then she'd changed her mind, she'd had it all taken back upstairs again. There's your motive right there. The doorman rang her apartment and said through the announcer, 'Mr. Wheeler's here.' And she gave a dirty laugh and sang out, 'I can hardly wait.'

"So at thirteen past eight she was still alive. He went up, and he'd no sooner got there than her apartment began to signal the doorman frantically. No one answered his hail over the announcer, so he chased up, and he found your brother crouched over her, shaking her, and she was dead. At fifteen minutes past eight o'clock. Is that a case or is that a case?"

I said, "How do you know somebody else wasn't in that apartment and strangled her just before Chick showed up? It's got to be that!"

He said, "What d'you suppose they're paying that doorman seventy-five a month for? The only other caller she had that whole day was you yourself, at three that afternoon, five full hours before. And she'd only been dead fifteen to twenty minutes by the time the assistant medical examiner got to her."

I said, "Does Chick say he did it?"

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"When you've been in this business as long as I have, you'd have their heads examined if any of them ever admitted doing anything. Oh, no-o, of course he didn't do it. He says he was crouched over her, shaking her, trying to *restore* her!"

I took a deep breath. I said, "Gimme a swallow of that gin. Thanks." I put the tumbler down again. I looked him right in the eye. "All right, *I* did it! Now how d'ye like that? I begged him not to throw his life away on her. When he walked out anyway, I beat him up to her place in a taxi, got there first, gave her one last chance to lay off him. She wouldn't take it. She was all soft and squashy and I just took a grip and pushed hard."

"And the doorman?" he said with a smile.

"His back was turned. He was out at the curb seeing some people into a cab. When I left, I took the stairs down. When Chick signaled from her apartment and the doorman left his post, I just walked out. It was a pushover."

His smile was a grin. "Well, if you killed her, you killed her." He called in to the other room, "Hey, Coley, she says *she* killed her!" Coley came back, flapped his hand at me disgustedly, said, "Come on, let's get out of here, there's nothing doing around here."

He opened the door, went out into the hall. I said, "Well, aren't you going to take me with you? Aren't you going to let him go and hold me instead?"

"Who the hell wants you?" came back through the open door.

Burns, as he got up to follow him, said off-handedly, "And what was she wearing when you killed her?" But he kept walking toward the door, without waiting for the answer.

They'd had a train to make. I swallowed hard. "Well, I — I was too steamed-up to notice colors or anything, but she had on her coat and hat, ready to leave."

He turned around at the door and looked at me. His grin was sort of sympathetic, understanding. "Sure," he said softly. "I guess she took 'em off, though, after she found out she was dead and wasn't going anywhere after all. We found her in pajamas. Write us a nice long letter about it tomorrow, Angel Face. We'll see you at the trial, no doubt."

There was a glass cigarette-box at my elbow. I grabbed it and heaved, berserk. "You rotten, lowdown — *detective,* you! Going around snooping, framing innocent people to death! Get out of here! I hope I never see your face again!"

It missed his head, crashed and tinkled against the door-frame to one side of him. He didn't cringe, I liked that about him, sore as I was. He just gave a long drawn-out whistle. "Maybe you did do it at that," he said, "maybe I'm underestimating you," and he touched his hatbrim and closed the door after him.

The courtroom was so unnaturally

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still that the ticking of my heart sounded like a cheap alarm-clock in the silence. I kept wondering how it was they didn't put me out for letting it make so much noise. A big blue fly was buzzing on the inside of the window-pane nearest me, trying to find its way out. The jurists came filing in like ghosts, and slowly filled the double row of chairs in the box. All you could hear was a slight rustle of clothing as they seated themselves. I kept thinking of the Inquisition, and wondered why they didn't have black hoods over their heads.

"Will the foreman of the jury please stand?"

I spaded both my hands down past my hips and grabbed the edges of my seat. My handkerchief fell on the floor and the man next to me picked it up and handed it back to me. I tried to say "Thanks" but my jaws wouldn't unlock.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

I told myself, "He won't be able to hear it, if my heart doesn't shut up." It was going *bangetty-bangetty-bang!*

"We have, your honor."

"Gentlemen of the jury, what is your verdict?"

The banging stopped; my heart wasn't going at all now. Even the fly stopped buzzing. The whole works stood still.

"We find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree."

Some woman screamed out "No!" at the top of her lungs. It must have been me, they were all turning their heads to look around at me. The next thing I knew, I was outside in the corridor and a whole lot of people were standing around me. Everything looked blurred. A voice said, "Give her air, stand back." Another voice said. "His sister. She was on the stand earlier in the week." Ammonia fumes kept tickling the membranes of my nostrils. The first voice said, "Take her home. Where does she live? Anybody know where she lives?"

"I know where she lives. I'll take care of her."

Somebody put an arm around my waist and walked me to the creaky courthouse elevator, led me out to the street, got in a taxi after me. I looked, and it was that dick, Burns. I climbed up into the corner of the cab, put my feet on the seat, shuffled them at him. I said, "Get away from me, you devil! You railroaded him, you butcher!"

"Attagirl," he said gently, "Feeling better already, aren't you?" He gave the old address, where Chick and I had lived. The cab started and I couldn't get him out of it. I felt too low even to fight any more.

"Not there," I said sullenly, "I'm holed up in a cheap furnished room now, off Second Avenue. I've hocked everything I own, down to my vaccination mark! How d'you suppose I got that lawyer Schlesinger for him? And a lot of good it did him! What a wash-out he turned out to be!"

"Don't blame him," he said. "He

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couldn't buck that case we turned over to the State; Darrow himself couldn't have. What he *should* have done was let *him* plead guilty to second-degree, then he wouldn't be in line for short-circuiting. That was his big mistake."

"No!" I shrilled at him. "He wanted us to do that, but neither Chick nor I would hear of it! Why should he plead guilty to anything, even if it was only housebreaking, when he's innocent? That's a guilty man's dodge, not an innocent man's. He hasn't got half-an-hour's detention rightfully coming to him! Why should he lie down and accept twenty years? He didn't lay a hand on Ruby Reading."

"Eleven million people, the mighty State of New York, say that he did."

I got out, went in the grubby entrance, between a delicatessen and a Chinese laundry. "Don't come in with me, I don't want to see any more of you!" I spat over my shoulder at him. "If I was a man I'd knock you down and beat the living hell out of you!"

He came on, though, and upstairs he closed the door behind him, pushing me out of the way to get in. He said, "You need help, Angel Face, and I'm crying to give it to you."

"Oh, biting the hand that feeds you, turning into a double-crosser, a turncoat!"

"No," he said, "no," and sort of held out his hands as if asking me for something. "Sell me, won't you?" he almost pleaded. "Sell me that he's innocent, and I'll work my fingers raw to back you up! I didn't frame your brother. I only did my job. I was sent there by my superiors in answer to the patrolman's call that night, questioned Chick, put him under arrest. You heard me answering their questions on the stand. Did I distort the facts any? All I told them was what I saw with my own eyes, what I found when I got to Reading's apartment. Don't hold that against me, Angel Face. Sell me, convince me that he didn't do it, and I'm with you up to the hilt."

"Why?" I said cynically. "Why this sudden yearning to undo the damage you've already done?"

He opened the door to go. "Look in the mirror sometime and find out," was all he said. "You can reach me at Center Street, Nick Burns." He held out his hand uncertainly, probably expecting me to slap it aside.

I took it instead. "O.K., flatfoot," I sighed wearily. "No use holding it against you that you're a detective, you probably don't know any better. Before you go, gimme the address of that maid of hers, Mandy Leroy. I've got an idea she didn't tell all she knew."

"She went home at five that day. How can she help you?"

"I bet she was greased plenty to softpedal the one right name that belongs in this case. She mayn't have been there, but she knew who to expect around. She may have even tipped him off that Ruby Rose was throwing him over. It takes a woman

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to see through a woman."

"Better watch yourself going up there alone," he warned me. He took out a notebook. "Here it is, 118th, just off Lenox." I jotted it down. "If she was paid off like you think, how you going to restore her memory? It'll take heavy sugar. . . ." He fumbled in his pocket, looked at me like he was a little scared of me, finally took out something and shoved it out of sight on the bureau. "Try your luck with that," he said. "Use it where it'll do the most good. Try a little intimidation with it, it may work."

I grabbed it up and he ducked out in a hurry, the big coward. A hundred and fifty bucks. I ran out to the stairs after him. "Hey!" I yelled, "aren't you married or anything?"

"Naw," he called back, "I can always get it back, anyway, if it does the trick." And then he added, "I always did want to have something on you, Angel Face."

I went back into my cubbyhole again. "Why, the big rummy!" I said hotly. I hadn't cried in court when Chick got the ax, just yelled out. But now my eyes got all wet.

"Mandy doan live her no mo'e," the colored janitor of the 118th Street tenement told me.

"Where'd she go? And don't tell me you don't know, because it won't work."

"She done move to a mighty presumptuous neighborhood, doan know how come all of a sudden. She gone to Edgecomb Avenue."

Edgecomb Avenue is the Park Avenue of New York's darktown. She'd mentioned on the stand, without being asked, that Reading had died owing her two months' wages. Yet she moves to the colored Gold Coast right on top of it. She hadn't been paid off — not much!

Edgecomb Avenue is nothing to be ashamed of in any man's town. Every one of the trim modern apartment buildings had a glossy private car or two parked in front of the door. I tackled the address he'd given me, and thought they were having a housewarming at first. They were singing inside and it sounded like a revival meeting.

A fat old lady came to the door, in a black silk dress, tears streaming down her cheeks. "I'se her mother, honey," she said softly in answer to what I told her, "and you done come at an evil hour. My lamb was run over on the street, right outside this building, only yesterday, first day we moved here! She's in there daid now, honey. The Lawd give and the Lawd has took away again."

I did a little thinking. Why just her, and nobody else, when she held the key to the Reading murder? "How did it happen to her, did they tell you?"

"Two white men in a car," she mourned. "'Peared almost like they run her down purposely. She was walking along the sidewalk, folks tell me, wasn't even in the gutter at all. And it swung right up on the

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sidewalk aftah her, go ovah her, then loop out in the middle again and light away, without nevah stopping!"

I went away saying to myself, "That girl was murdered as sure as I'm born, to shut her mouth. First she was bribed, then when the trial was safely over she was put out of the way for good!" Somebody big was behind all this. And what did I have to fight that somebody with? A borrowed hundred and fifty bucks, an offer of cooperation from a susceptible detective, and a face.

I went around to the building Ruby Rose had lived in, and struck the wrong shift. "Charlie Baker doesn't come on until six, eh?" I told the doorman. "Where does he live? I want to talk to him."

"He don't come on at all any more. He quit his job, as soon as that—" he tilted his head to the ceiling, "mess we had upstairs was over with, and he didn't have to appear in court no more."

"Well, where's he working now?"

"He ain't working at all, lady. He don't have to any more. I understand a relative of his died in the old country, left him quite a bit, and him and his wife and his three kids have gone back to England to live."

So he'd been paid off heavily too. It looked like I was up against Wall Street itself. No wonder everything had gone so smoothly. No wonder even a man like Schlesinger hadn't been able to make a dent in the case.

"But I'm not licked yet," I said to myself, back in my room. "I've still got this face. It ought to be good for something. If I only knew where to push it, who to flash it on!"

Burns showed up that night, to find out how I was making out. "Here's your hundred and fifty back," I told him bitterly. "I'm up against a stone wall every way I turn. But is it a coincidence that the minute the case is in the bag, their two chief witnesses are permanently disposed of, one by exportation, the other by hit-and-run? They're not taking any chances on anything backfiring later."

He said, "You're beginning to sell me. It smells like rain."

I sat down on the floor (there was only one chair in the dump) and took a dejected half-Nelson around my own ankles. "Look, it goes like this. Some guy did it. Some guy that was sold on her. Plenty of names were spilled by Mandy and Baker, but not the right one. The ones that were brought out didn't lead anywhere, you saw that yourself. The mechanics of the thing don't trouble me a bit, the how and why could be cleared up easy enough—even by you."

"Thanks," he said.

"It's the *who* that has me buffaloed. There's a gap there I can't jump across to the other side. From there on, I could handle it beautifully. But I've got to close that gap, that *who,* or I might as well put in the order for Chick's headstone right now."

He took out a folded newspaper

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and whacked himself disgustedly across the shins with it. "Tough going, kid," he agreed.

"I'll make it," I said. "You can't keep a good girl down. The right guy is in this town. And so am I in this town. I'll connect with him yet, if I've got to use a ouija board!"

He said, "You haven't got all winter. He comes up for sentence Wednesday." He opened the door. "I'm on your side," he let me know in that quiet way of his.

He left the paper behind him on the chair. I sat down and opened it. I wasn't going to do any reading, but I wanted to think behind it. And then I saw her name. The papers had been full of her name for weeks, but this was different; this was just a little boxed ad off at the side.

AUCTION SALE
Jewelry, personal effects and furniture belonging to the late Ruby Rose Reading
Monarch Galleries Saturday A.M.

I dove at the window, rammed it up, leaned halfway out. I caught him just coming out of the door.

"Burns!" I screeched at the top of my voice. "Hey, Burns! Bring that hundred and fifty back up here! I've changed my mind!"

The place was jammed to the gills with curiosity-mongers and bargain-hunters, and probably professional dealers too, although they were supposed to be excluded. There were about two dozen of those 100-watt blue-white bulbs in the ceiling that auction rooms go in for and the bleach of light was intolerable, worse than on a sunny beach at high noon.

I was down front, in the second row on the aisle; I'd got there early. I wasn't interested in her diamonds or her furs or her thissas or her thattas. I was hoping something would come up that would give me some kind of a clue, but what I expected it to be, I didn't know myself. An inscription on a cigarette case maybe. I knew how little chance there was of anything like that. The D.A.'s office had sifted through her things pretty thoroughly before Chick's trial, and what they'd turned up hadn't amounted to a row of pins. She'd been pretty cagy that way, hadn't left much around. All bills had been addressed to her personally, just like she'd paid her rent with her own personal checks, and fed the account herself. Where the funds originated in the first place was never explained. I suppose she took in washing.

They started off with minor articles first, to warm the customers up. A cocktail shaker that played a tune, a make-up mirror with a light behind it, a ship's model, things like that. They got around to her clothes next, and the women customers started "ohing" and "ahing" and foaming at the mouth. By the looks of most of them that was probably the closest they'd ever get to real sin, bidding for its hand-me-downs.

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The furniture came next, and they started to talk real money now. This out of the way, her ice came on. Brother, she'd made them say it with diamonds, and they'd all spoken above a whisper too! When the last of it went, that washed up the sale; there was nothing else left to dispose of but the little rosewood jewel-case she'd kept them in. About ten by twelve by ten inches deep, with a little gilt key and lock; not worth a damn but there it was. However, if you think an auctioneer passes up anything, you don't know your auctioneers.

"What am I offered for this?" he said almost apologetically. "Lovely little trinket box, give it to your best girl or your wife or your mother, to keep her ornaments in or old love letters." He knocked the veneer with his knuckles, held it outward to show us the satin lining. Nothing in it, like in a vaudeville magician's act. "Do I hear fifty cents, just to clear the stand?"

Most of them were getting up and going already. An overdressed guy in my same row, across the aisle, spoke up. "You hear a buck."

I took a look at him, and I took a look at the box. "If you want it, I want it, too," I decided suddenly. "A guy splurged up like you don't hand a plain wooden box like that to any woman that he knows." I opened my mouth for the first time since I'd come in the place. "You hear a dollar and a quarter."

"Dollar-fifty."

"Two dollars."

"Five." The way he snapped it out, he meant business.

I'd never had such a strong hunch in my life before but now I wanted that box, had to have it, I felt it would do me some good. Maybe this overdressed monkey had given it to her, maybe Burns could trace where it had been bought. . . .

"Seven-fifty."

"Ten."

"Twelve."

The auctioneer was in seventh heaven. "You're giving yourself away, brother, you're giving yourself away!" I warned my competitor silently.

We leaned forward out of our seats and sized each other up. If he was giving himself away, I suppose I was too. I could see a sort of shrewd speculation in his snaky eyes, they screwed up into slits, seeming to say "What's your racket?" Something cold went down my back, hot as it was under all those mazdas.

"Twenty-five dollars," he said inexorably.

I thought: "I'm going to get that thing if I spend every cent of the money Burns loaned me!"

"Thirty," I said.

With that, to my surprise, he stood up, flopped his hand at it disgustedly, and walked out.

When I came out five minutes later with the box wrapped up under my arm. I saw him sitting in a young dreadnaught with another man, a few yards down the street.

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"So I'm going to be followed home," I said to myself, "to find out who I am." That didn't worry me any; I'd rented my room under my old stage name of Honey Sebastian (my idea of a classy tag at sixteen) to escape the notoriety attendant on Chick's trial. I turned up the other way and hopped down into the subway, which is about the best bet when the following is to be done from a car. As far as I could make out, no one came after me.

I watched the street from a corner of the window after I got home, and no one going by stopped or looked at the house or did anything but mind his own business. And if it had been that flashy guy on my tail, you could have heard him coming from a block away. I turned to the wrapped box and broke the string.

Burns' knock at my door at five that afternoon was a tattoo of anxious impatience. "God, you took long to get here!" I blurted out, "I phoned you three times since noon."

"Lady," he protested, "I've been busy, I was out on something else, only just got back to Headquarters ten minutes ago. Boy, you threw a fright into me."

I didn't stoop to asking him why he should be so worried something had happened to me; he might have given me the right answer. "Well," I said, "I've got him." And I passed him the rosewood jewel case.

"Got who?"

"The guy that Chick's been made a patsy for."

He opened it, looked in, looked under it. "What's this?"

"Hers. I had a hunch, and I bought it. He must have had a hunch too — only his agent — and it must have been his agent, he wouldn't show up himself — didn't follow it through, wasn't sure enough. Stick your thumb under the little lock. Not over it, down below it, and press hard on the wood." Something clicked, and the satin bottom flapped up, like it had with me.

"Fake bottom, eh?" he said.

"Don't be an echo. Read that top letter out loud. That was the last one she got, very day it happened."

"'You know, baby,'" Burns read. "'I think too much of you to ever let you go. And if you ever tired of me and tried to leave me, I'd kill you first, and then you could go wherever you want. They tell me you've been seen going around a lot lately with some young punk. Now, baby, I hope for his sake, and yours too, that when I come back day after tomorrow I find it isn't so, just some more of my boys' lies. They like to rib me sometimes, see if I can take it or not.'"

"He gave her a bum steer there on purpose," I pointed out, "He came back 'tomorrow' and not 'day after,' and caught her with the goods."

"Milt," Burns read from the bottom of the page. And then he looked at me, and didn't see me for once.

"Militis, of course," I said, "the Greek night-club king. Milton, as he

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calls himself. Everyone on Broadway knows him. And yet, d'you notice how that name stayed out of the trial? Not a whisper from beginning to end! That's the missing name all right!"

"It reads that way, I know," he said undecidedly, "but there's this: She knew her traffic signals. Why would she chuck away the banana and hang onto the skin? In other words, Milton spells real dough, your brother wasn't even carfare."

"But Militis had her branded—"

"Sure, but—"

"No, I'm not talking slang now. I mean actually, physically; its mentioned in one of these letters. The autopsy report had it too, remember? Only they mistook it for an operation scar or scald. Well, when a guy does that, anyone would have looked good to her, and Chick was probably a godsend. The branding was probably not the half of it, either. It's fairly well known that Milton likes to play rough with his women."

"All right, kid," he said, "but I've got bad news for you. This evidence isn't strong enough to have the verdict set aside and a new trial called. A clever mouthpiece could blow this whole pack of letters out the window with one breath. Ardent Greek temperament, and that kind of thing, you know. You remember how Schlesinger dragged it out of Mandy that she'd overheard more than one guy make the same kind of jealous threats. Did it do any good?"

"This is the McCoy, though. He came through, this one, Militis."

"But, baby, you're telling it to me and I convince easy, from you. You're not telling it to the Grand Jury."

I shoved the letters at him. "Just the same, you chase out have 'em photostated, every last one of them, and put 'em in a cool, dry place. I'm going to dig something a little more convincing to go with them, if that's what's needed. What clubs does he own?"

"What clubs doesn't he? There's Hell's Bells—" He stopped short, looked at me. "You stay out of there."

"One word from you . . ." I purred, and closed the door after him.

"A little higher," the manager said. "Don't be afraid, we've seen it all before."

I took another hitch in my hoisted skirt, gave him a look. "If it's my appendix you want to size up, say so. It's easier to uncover the other way around, from up to down. I just sing and dance. I don't bathe for the customers."

"I like 'em like that," he nodded approvingly to his yes-man. "Give her a chord, Mike," he said to his pianist.

"The Man I Love," I said. "I do dusties, not new ones."

"And he'll be big and strong,
The man I love—"

"Good tonsils," he said. "Give her a dance-chorus, Mike."

Mike said disgustedly. "Why d'ya wanna waste your time? Even if she was paralyzed from the waist down

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and had a voice like a frog, ain't you got eyes? Get a load of her face, will you?"

"You're in," the manager said. "Thirty-five, and buy yourself some up-to-date lyrics. Come around at eight and get fitted for some duds. What's your name?"

"Bill me as Angel Face," I said, "and have your electrician give me an amber spot. They take the padlocks off their wallets when I come out in an amber spot."

He shook his head, almost sorrowfully. "Hang onto that face, girlie. It ain't gonna happen again in a long time!"

Burns was holding up my locked room-door with one shoulder when I got back. "Here's your letters back; I've got the photostats tucked away in a safe place. Where'd you disappear to?"

"I've landed a job at Hell's Bells. I'm going to get that guy and get him good! If that's the way I've got to get the evidence, that's the way. After all, if he was sold on her, *I'll* have him cutting out paper dolls before two weeks are out. What'd she have that I haven't got? Now, stay out of there. Somebody might know your face, and you'll only queer everything."

"Watch yourself, will you, Angel Face? You're playing a dangerous game. That Milton is nobody's fool. If you need me in a hurry, you know where to reach me. I'm right at your shoulder, all the way through."

I went in and stuck the letters back in the fake bottom of the case. I had an idea I was going to have a visitor fairly soon, and wasn't going to tip my hand. I stood it on the dresser-top and threw in a few pins and glass beads for luck.

The timing was eerie. The knock came inside of ten minutes. I'd known it was due, but not that quick. It was my competitor from the auction room, flashy as ever; he'd changed flowers, that was all.

"Miss Sebastian," he said, "isn't it? I'd like very much to buy that jewel case you got."

"I noticed that this morning."

He went over and squinted into it.

"That all you wanted it for, just to keep junk like that in?"

"What'd you expect to find, the Hope diamond?"

"You seemed willing to pay a good deal."

"I lose my head easy in auction rooms. But, for that matter, you seemed to be willing to go pretty high yourself."

"I still am," he said. He turned it over, emptied my stuff out, tucked it under his arm, put something down on the dresser. "There's a hundred dollars. Buy yourself a real good one."

Through the window I watched the dreadnaught drift away again. "Just a little bit too late in getting here," I smiled after it. "The cat's out of the bag now and a bulldog will probably chase it."

The silver dress fitted me like a

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wet compress. It was one of those things that break up homes. The manager flagged me in the pasageway leading back. "Did you notice that man all by himself at a ringside table? You know who he is, don't you?"

If I hadn't, why had I bothered turning on all my current his way? "No," I said, round-eyed, "who?"

"Milton. He owns the works. The reason I'm telling you is this: You've got a date with a bottle of champagne at his table, starting in right now. Get on in there."

We walked on back.

"Mr. Milton, this is Angel Face," the manager said. "She won't give us her right name, just walked in off 52nd Street last Tuesday."

"And I waited until tonight to drop around here!" he laughed. "What you paying her, Berger?" Then before the other guy could get a word out, "Triple it! And now get out of here."

The night ticked on. He'd look at me then he'd suddenly throw up his hands as though to ward off a dazzling glare. "Turn it off, it hurts my eyes."

I smiled a little and took out my mirror. I saw my eyes in it, and in each iris there was a little electric chair with Chick sitting strapped in it. Three weeks from now, sometime during that week. Boy, how they were rushing him! It made it a lot easier to go ahead.

I went back to what we'd been talking about — and what are any two people talking about, more or less, in a night-club at four in the morning? "Maybe," I said, "who can tell? Some night I might just feel like changing the scenery around me, but I couldn't tell you about it, I'm not that kind."

"You wouldn't have to," he said. He fooled with something below table-level, then passed his hand to me. I took it and knotted my handkerchief around the latch-key he'd left in it. Burns had been right, it was a dangerous game, and bridges were blazing and collapsing behind me.

The doorman covered a yawn with a white kid glove, said, "Who shall I announce?"

"That's all been taken care of," I said, "so you can go back to your beauty sleep."

He caught on, said insinuatingly, "It's Mr. Milton, isn't it? He's out of town tonight."

"You're telling me!" I thought. I'd sent him the wire that fixed that, signed the name of the manager of his Philly club. "You've been reading my mail," I said, and closed the elevator in his face.

The key worked, and the light-switch worked, and his Filipino had the night off, so the rest was up to me. The clock in his two-story living-room said four-fifteen. I went to the second floor of his penthouse and started in on the bedroom. He was using the jewel-case, Ruby Rose Reading's to hold his collar buttons

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in, hadn't thrown it out. I opened the fake bottom to see if he'd found what he was after, and the letters were gone, probably burned.

I located his wall safe but couldn't crack it. While I was still working at it, the phone downstairs started to ring. I jumped as though a pin had been stuck into me, and started shaking like I was still doing one of my routines at the club. He had two phones, one downstairs, one in the bedroom, which was an unlisted number. I snapped out the lights, ran downstairs, picked it up. I didn't answer, just held it.

Burns' voice said, "Angel Face?" in my ear.

"Gee, you sure frightened me!" I exhaled.

"Better get out of there. He just came back, must have tumbled to the wire. A spotter at Hell's Bells tipped me off he was just there asking for you."

"I can't, now," I wailed. "I woke his damn doorman up getting in just now, and I'm in that silver dress I do my numbers in! He'll tell him I was here. I'll have to play it dumb."

"D'ja get anything?"

"Nothing, only that jewel case! I couldn't get the safe open but he's probably burned everything connecting him to her long ago."

"Please get out of there, kid," he pleaded. "You don't know that guy. He's going to pin you down on the mat if he finds you there."

"I'm staying," I said. "I've got to break him down tonight, it's my last chance. Chick eats chicken and ice-cream tomorrow night at six. Oh, Burns, pray for me, will you?"

"I'm going to do more than that," he growled. "I'm going to give a wrong-number call there in half an hour. It's four-thirty now. Five that'll be. If you're doing all right, I'll lie low. If not, I'm not going to wait, I'll break in with some of the guys, and we'll use the little we have, the photostats of the letters, and the jewel case. I think Schlesinger can at least get Chick a reprieve on them, if not a new trial. If we can't get Milton, we can't get him, that's all."

"We've got to get him," I said, "and we're going to! He's even been close to breaking down and admitting it to me, at times, when we're alone together. Then at the last minute he gets leery. I'm convinced in my own mind he's guilty. So help me, if I lose Chick tomorrow night, I'm going to shoot Milton with my own hands!"

"Remember, half an hour. If everything's under control, cough. If you can get anywhere near the phone, *cough!* If I don't hear you cough, I'm pulling the place."

I hung up, ran up the stairs tearing at the silver cloth. I jerked open a closet door, found the cobwebby negligee he'd always told me was waiting for me there whenever I felt like breaking it in. I chased downstairs again in it, more like Godiva than anyone else, grabbed up a cigarette, flopped back full length on the handiest divan and did a Cleo-

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patra — just as the outside door opened and he and two other guys came in.

Milton had a face full of storm-clouds — until he saw me. Then it cleared, the sun came up in it. "Finally!" he crooned. "Finally you wanted a change of scenery! And just tonight somebody had to play a practical joke on me, start me on a fool's errand to Philly! Have you been here long?"

I couldn't answer right away, because I was still trying to get my breath back after the quick-change act I'd just pulled. I managed a vampish smile.

He turned to the two guys. "Get out, you two. Can't you see I have company?"

I'd recognized the one who'd contacted me for the jewel case, and knew what was coming. I figured I could handle it. "Why that's the dame I told you about, Milt," he blurted out, "that walked off with that little box the other day!"

"Oh, hello," I sang out innocently. "I didn't know that you knew Mr. Milton."

Milton flared, "You, Rocco! Don't call my lady friends dames!" and slapped him backhand across the mouth. "Now scar-ram! You think we need four for bridge?"

"All right, boss, all right," he said soothingly. But he went over to a framed "still" of me, that Milton had brought home from Hell's Bells, and stood, thoughtfully in front of it for a minute. Then he and the other guy left. It was only after the elevator-light had flashed out that I looked over and saw the frame was empty.

"Hey!" I complained, "That Rocco swiped my picture, right under your nose!"

He thought he saw a bowl of cream in front of him; nothing could get his back up. "Who can blame him? You're so lovely to look at."

He spent some time working on the theory that I'd finally found him irresistible. After what seemed years of that, I sidestepped him neatly, got off the divan just in time.

He got good and peeved finally. "Are you giving me the run-around? What did you come here for anyway?"

"Because she's double-crossing you!" a voice said from the foyer. "Because she came here to frame you, chief, and I know it!"

The other two had come back. Rocco pulled my picture out of his pocket. "I traced that dummy wire you got, sending you to Philly. The clerk at the telegraph office identified her as the sender, from this picture. Ask her why she wanted to get you out of town, and then come up here and case your lay-out! Ask her why she was willing to pay thirty bucks for a little wood box, when she was living in a seven-buck furnished room! Ask her *who she is!* You weren't at the Reading trial, were you? Well, I was! You're riding for a fall, chief, by having her around you. She's a stoolie!"

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He turned on me. "Who are you? What does he mean?"

What was the good of answering? It was five to five on the clock. I needed Burns bad.

The other one snarled, "She's the patsy's sister. Chick Wheeler's sister. I saw her on the stand, with my own eyes."

Milton's face screwed up into a sort of despairing agony; I'd never seen anything like it before. He whimpered, "And you're so beautiful to have to be killed!"

I hugged the negligee around me tight and looked down at the floor. "Then don't have me killed," I said softly. It was two to five, now.

He said with comic sadness. "I got to if you're that guy's sister."

"I say I'm nobody's sister, just Angel Face that dances at your club. I say I only came here 'cause — I like soft carpets."

"Why did you send that fake telegram to get me out of town?"

He had me there. I thought fast. "If I'm a stoolie I get killed, right? But what happens if I'm the other kind of a double-crosser, a two-timer, do I still get killed?"

"No," he said, "because you were still a free-lance; your option hadn't been taken up yet."

"That's the answer, then. I was going to use your place to meet my steady, that's why I sent the queer wire."

Rocco's voice was as cracked as a megaphone after a football rally. "She's Wheeler's sister, chief. Don't let her ki —"

"Shut up!" Milton said.

Rocco just smiled a wise smile, shrugged, lit a cigarette. "You'll find out."

The phone rang. "Get that," Milton ordered. "That's her guy now. Keep him on the wire." he turned and went running up the stairs to the floor above, where the other phone was.

Rocco took out a gun, fanned it vaguely in my direction, sauntered over. "Don't try nothing, now, while that line's open. You may be fooling Milton, you're not fooling us any. He was always a sucker for a twist."

Rocco's buddy said, "Hello?"

Rocco, still holding the gun on me, took a lopsided drag on his cigarette with his left hand and blew smoke vertically. Some of it caught in his throat, and he started to cough like a seal. You could hear it all over the place.

I could feel all the blood draining out of my face.

The third guy was purring, "No, you tell me what number you want first, then I'll tell you what number this is. That's the way it's done pal." He turned a blank face. "Hung up on me!"

Rocco was still hacking away. I felt sick all over. Sold out by my own signal that everything was under control!

There was a sound like dry leaves on the stairs and Milton came whisking down again. "Some guy wanted an all night delicatess —" the spokes-

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man started to say.

Milton cut his hand at him viciously. "That was Center Street, police headquarters. I had it traced! Put some clothes on her, she's going to her funeral!"

They forced me back into the silver sheath between them. Milton came over with a flagon of brandy and dashed it all over me from head to foot. "If she lets out a peep, she's fighting drunk. Won't be the first stewed dame carried outa here!"

They had to hold me up between them, my heels just clear the ground, to get me to move at all. Rocco had his gun buried in the silver folds of my dress. The other had a big handkerchief spread out in his hand held under my face, as though I were nauseated — in reality to squelch any scream.

Milton came behind us. "You shouldn't mix your drinks," he was saying, "and especially you shouldn't help yourself to people's private stock without permission."

But the doorman was asleep again on his bench, like when I'd come in the first time. This time he didn't wake up. His eyelids just flickered a little as the four of us went by.

They saw to it that I got in the car first, like a lady should. The ride was one of those things you take to your grave with you. My whole past life came before me, in slow motion. I didn't mind dying so terribly much, but I hated to go without being able to do anything for Chick. But it was the way the cards had fallen, that was all.

"Maybe it's better this way," I said to myself, "than growing into an old lady and no one looks at your face any more." I took out my mirror and I powdered my nose, and then I threw the compact away. I'd show them a lady could die like a gentleman!

The house was on the Sound. Milton evidently lived in it quite a bit, by the looks of it. His Filipino let us in.

"Build a fire, Juan, it's chilly," he grinned. And to me, "Sit down, Angel Face, and let me look at you before you go." The other two threw me into a corner of a big sofa, and I just stayed that way, limp like a rag doll. He just stared and stared. "Gosh, you're swell!" he said.

Rocco said, "What're we waiting for? It's broad daylight already."

Milton was idly holding something into the fire, a long poker of some kind. "She's going," he said, "but she's going as my property. Show the other angels this, when you get up there, so they'll know who you belong to." He came over to me with the end of the thing glowing dull red. It was flattened into some kind of an ornamental design or cipher. "Knock her out," he said, "I'm not that much of a brute."

Something exploded off the side of my head, and I lost my senses. Then he was wiping my mouth with a handkerchief soaked in whiskey, and my side burned, just above the

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hip, where they'd found that mark on Ruby Rose Reading.

"All right, Rocco," Milton said.

Rocco took out his gun again, but he shoved it at the third guy helt-first. The third one held it level at me, took the safety off. His face was sort of green and wet with sweat. I looked him straight in the eyes. The gun went down like a drooping lily. "I can't, boss, she's too beautiful!" he groaned. "She's got the face of an angel. How can you shoot anything like that?"

Milton pulled it away from him. "She double-crossed me just like Reading did. Any dame that double-crosses me gets what I gave Reading."

A voice said softly. "That's all I wanted to know."

The gun went off, and I wondered why I didn't feel anything. Then I saw that the smoke was coming from from the doorway and not from Milton's gun at all. He went down at my feet, like he wanted to apologize for what he'd done to me, but he didn't say anything and he didn't get up any more. There was blood running down the part of his hair in back.

Burns was in the room, with more guys than I'd ever seen outside of a police parade. One of them was the doorman from Milton's place, or at least the dick that Burns had substituted for him to keep an eye on me while I was up there. Burns told me about that later and about how they followed Milt's little party but hadn't been able to get in in time to keep me from getting branded. Rocco and the other guy went down into hamburger under a battery of heavy fists.

I sat there holding my side and sucking in my breath. "It was a swell trick-finish," I panted to Burns, "but what'd you drill him for? Now we'll never get the proof that'll save Chick."

He was at the phone asking to be put through to Schlesinger in the city. "We've got it already, Angel Face," he said ruefully. "It's right on you, where you're holding your side. Just where it was on Reading. We all heard what he said before he nose-dived anyway. I only wish I hadn't shot him," he glowered, "then I'd have the pleasure of doing it all over again, more slowly."

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At the time of this writing John Dickson Carr's anthology, THE TEN BEST DETECTIVE NOVELS, *has not yet been published. For his gargantuan anthology Mr. Carr wrote a wonderful 15,000-word Introduction, one-third of which will appear in EQMM — but more of that epic event at the proper time. The point we are getting to, in our usual roundabout way, is that Mr. Carr nominated a select circle of modern American murdermongers: he included S. S. Van Dine, Ellery Queen, Rex Stout, and Anthony Abbot, and went on to say that "in the front rank, or very close to it, [are] Clayton Rawson and C. Daly King."*

The name of C. Daly King (insufficiently mentioned in all critical appraisals of the contemporary detective story) prompted Mr. Carr to add the following footnote: "I do not know whether C. Daly King is still writing. His OBELIST *stories of the early 30's were excellent, marred only by one or two medical errors and a perverted sense of humor in his character-names. A Behaviorist named Dr. B. Hayvier in one book, a surgeon named Cutter in another, should be confined to the realm of comedy along with Dickens's fine old medical names of Sawyer, Slasher, and Nockemorf."*

If so voracious a reader and so astute a critic as John Dickson Carr is uncertain whether or not C. Daly King is still writing, it behooves your Editor to tell the world, and in no uncertain terms. Yes, indeed, C. Daly King is still writing detective stories. And to back that statement with irrefutable proof, we now offer you a brand-new Trevis Tarrant short story — "The Episode of the Sinister Inventor"; and to whet your appetite — yours in particular, Mr. Carr — we inform you that C. Daly King has just completed the manuscript of the first Trevis Tarrant novel — THE EPISODE OF THE DEMOISELLE D'YS. *Publishers, get busy! Snag that manuscript!*

Mr. King characterized "The Episode of the Sinister Inventor" with a single word, in parentheses — to wit, (Pasticcio). We leave it to you to make the correct interpretation. Our tongue is tied: it is the one and only 'tec topic that is, with a capital letter, Unmentionable — especially in the sanctum sanctorum of EQMM . . .

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THE EPISODE OF THE SINISTER INVENTOR

by C. DALY KING

IN ONLY ONE of the many adventures I have shared with Trevis Tarrant have I known him to take a pompous tone but on that occasion, in his conversations with Inspector of the New York Homicide Division, one might have detected Sherlock Holmes's own "elementary, Watson," more than once.

It is the chief reason I have refrained for many years from setting out the episode, for it had details of a considerable and baffling interest. But recently Tarrant has seen fit to place me in a highly embarrassing position; this occurred in connection with the Episode of the Doubtful Deacon, in the course of which he deliberately led me on to a public accusation of the only innocent character in the case, an exceedingly beautiful blonde girl by the surprising name of Jezibel Tweech-Tweech. Using such a ruse he was enabled to lay a desperate criminal by the heels; but the apologies so forced upon me were excessive and I shall never forget the flashing lavender irises of the superb and womanly creature as she spurned my belated advances.

I am thus in no mood to deal with Tarrant punctiliously and I propose to inform the public of his somewhat toplofty attitude in the matter of the inventor's sinister story. Perhaps he was still nettled with Peake over the Nail and Requiem contretemps, for it was not yet a full year since we had taken part in that gruesome affair.

The following Fall was more unseasonable, however, and a sleety rain was glancing from the windows of Tarrant's sunken living room and slanting into the street in the East Thirties on which they gave. Outside, taxis and an occasional pedestrian scurried through the dismal October afternoon; but with one or two lamps glowing comfortably in the luxurious apartment and a small fire on the urban hearth it was snug enough within. Tarrant was reading quietly —— a dilapidated old volume dealing with the early excavations of Col. Vyse at the Pyramids. I had a novel. My wife and sister were coming in later for cocktails but the butler-valet was enjoying a day off and for the moment Tarrant and I were alone.

The buzzer at the apartment entrance sounded abruptly. I looked up in surprise and Tarrant laid aside his book with a sigh. "I am expecting no one," he declared as he went to his door. I heard a murmur in the small foyer beyond the living room and a moment later saw my friend helping Inspector Peake out of a drenched Burberry. The homicide man was as well-tailored as ever but his clothes were a little wrinkled and

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one of his brogues caked with a muddy clay.

"A brandy?" said Tarrant. "No, I see you have had a long stretch of it, up all night and hardly a bite to eat today. A bottle of beer and some cheese and crackers will suit you better, eh, Peake? After that we can discuss the matter that is puzzling you about this murder."

"What, you know about it?"

"Not at all," Tarrant assured him. "But when as immaculate a policeman as you presents himself in mussed clothing and badly in need of a shave at this hour of the day, it is plain that both his costume and his chin are yesterday's and that he has been so busy since then as to preclude his usual toilet. Add that little yellow spot on the lapel and the dark stain at the cuff and it becomes obvious that even food has had to be snatched hurriedly, consisting probably of no more than a hasty egg and a rapid cup of coffee."

"It seems clear enough," Peake admitted. "I hope you will be able to do as well with what is perplexing me."

Tarrant had now provided the refreshment, which his guest lost no time in attacking. But even after several large gulps of the lager Peake's frown was still on his face.

"You are afraid you have arrested the wrong man," declared Tarrant. "But isn't it too soon to despair as yet?"

Peake demanded, "You know of the case already? I don't see how you can; it broke only last night. Late, too. How can you know, sir?"

"Surely that is obvious, Peake. I find the Homicide Division engaged and therefore, clearly, we are dealing with murder. If you went out on it last night and have been working ever since, then you began with enough advantage to offer a lot of immediate action. Possibly even a quick arrest. But your present depression — more than that, the fact that you have dropped in here with a problem, at your first respite and even before taking a plainly needed rest — indicates a serious hitch. What could be more so than a suddenly arisen suspicion that the action had been too swift and the wrong man in custody? You see?"

"I see that I must be more transparent than I had supposed. You have hit it the first time. Are you sure you don't know about this Studd murder?"

"Not a thing," Tarrant told him. "I don't see quite how it could be in the papers yet anyhow but if it were, I wouldn't know about it. I never read murder reports; I'm not interested in mere brutality."

"But a real problem finds you more curious?"

"That is so."

"A complete contradiction in the evidence?"

"Yes, indeed."

"An altogether insoluble *impasse?*"

"There are none."

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"I am afraid that we have one here."

"No, Peake, that is impossible. There are no insoluble problems when all, or even enough of, the facts are known. Will you explain the situation from the beginning?"

The inspector had now succeeded in dispatching the entire cut of cheese that Tarrant had placed before him. With a second bottle of beer at his side he leaned back in the chair and proceeded to lay before us a concise account of the crime.

"It concern two inventors," he began. "One of them a woman, about forty, lean, unattractive and unmarried. Of course she had a college degree, two of them, I recall. Her name was Josephine Studd of 10067 Kew Gardens and she was the victim. She was shot through the stomach and left to die alone in an empty house. A callously brutal crime."

"Vicious," said Tarrant shortly. "We shall have this thug."

"The other inventor," Peake continued evenly, "is James Templeton Rowrer of Chelsea Village. He is somewhat older, perhaps fifty-five, and I have seldom seen a more shifty individual, with his squinting eyes, his sharp chin and his long, inquisitive nose. It was in his house that the woman was killed and I am afraid that the evidence against him was so overwhelming that he is now the inmate of a cell. However, it appears that we are entirely unable to break down his alibi; I shall be forced to let him go."

"I should advise against it. So far your action seems to have been precipitate; let us stop and consider before taking further hasty measures. But tell us more about these two persons; surely their respective inventions will throw some light upon their personalities and this dreadful climax of their lives."

"Both have a number of contrivances to their credit but I cannot see that they give us any real clue. The woman has invented such things as collapsible pins, a barrel typewriter, non-inflammable cigars, spring-heeled mules and 'Chameleon' face powder —"

Tarrant interrupted. "These do not seem to be very practical inventions."

"We have had reports upon them. They appear to work. For example, the 'Chameleon' face powder is so made that its color becomes lighter with the passage of time; thus the lady who uses it can apply it in the afternoon when the sun is high and yet in the evening, under artificial light, it has itself changed its hue and she does not need to supply herself with two different cosmetics. The non-inflammable cigars do not burn, of course, and so do not leave an untidy trail of ashes behind, but there is a chemical contrivance inside which produces a smoke that can be inhaled as usual. The spring-heeled mules provide the wearer with an exceptionally bouncy and exhilarating gait. . . . The man has devised such implements as a mustache

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measure, an automatic pipe-fan, a single-piece coat and vest, a tight-rope balancer, steel caps for the teeth of hounds and a barrel typewriter."

"Hold! They are not only rival inventors but were in conflict upon the same device?"

"Exactly," Peake admitted. "The all-important letter in this case specifically says so. The barrel typewriter is undoubtably the cause of an enmity so bitter as to have ended in a blood-stained crime!"

"I should not have supposed the contraption to be so valuable. His other —"

"They also are workable," declared the police inspector. "The mustache measure is a handy instrument to assure that both ends of the decoration are of equal length; and if you smoke a pipe, you have probably often wished it would stay alight when you laid it down for a moment. The vest is attached within the front openings of the coat and thus the two garments have to be buttoned only once. The artificial hound's teeth permit the savage beast to tear apart its prey rapidly. As to the tight-rope balancer, it is a small gyroscope to be secured inconspicuously at the base of the spine; without previous experience any purchaser is enabled to perform upon the tight-rope with extraordinary skill. It is also recommended for the prevention of professional accidents."

"But the typewriter, man, the typewriter!"

"Well, that," Peake confessed, "is perhaps the most practical of the lot. It is so designed that, when supported between the knees on an appropriate stand, the hands fall naturally along both sides of it. Of course one must learn a touch system in order to operate it but there occurs much less fatigue than with the usual machine and far faster typing speeds are attainable. Both of these people hit upon it at the same time and, since any large typewriter manufacturer would pay a high price in order to prevent its making his own product unmarketable, there was a good deal at stake."

"You must not let this man go, Peake!"

"I cannot hold him much longer."

"There must be a way. The details of the crime, then?"

"Late on the evening of October sixteenth, yesterday," we were told, "James Templeton Rowrer arrived in New York from a short visit to Boston; he had left the previous day, the fifteenth, at about noon and his house had been empty during the interval. Upon his return he took a cab from Charing Cross — I mean, Grand Central — for, although the distance to his house was a long one, he was accompanied by a heavy box which he could not manage through the underground alone.

"The cabby or taximan is an important witness. Upon reaching the house this man helped to carry the box up onto the porch and then, when Rowrer had unlocked the front door, on into the hallway, a rather

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spacious room. Here, when they had deposited the heavy burden, the owner at once reached down to retrieve a letter from the floor and, as he did so, the driver cried out that there was a body lying prone upon the boards at the far end of the chamber. There was already one dim light burning; when more were turned up, he gazed in horror upon the awful sight of Miss Studd's corpse.

"He states, however, that his fare seemed not greatly overwrought at the sudden turn of events. Rowrer merely gave a shrug, walked away from the body (which he had been careful not to touch) and sat down to call the police from his hallway telephone. From that moment until the arrival of the officials both men remained in the room and Rowrer had the calm audacity to offer a packet of cigarettes to his companion, one of which he himself lit and was consuming when the men arrived. The cabman's testimony shows that during this interval the inventor did not approach his rival's body, move from the seat he had chosen, or indeed indulge in any other action whatsoever.

"A careful examination was at once undertaken and by the time I had reached the scene, the sharp-eyed cabman had disclosed the fact of Rowrer's picking up a letter at their original entrance and the man had reluctantly yielded it to the police." The inspector drew out the document from his wallet. "At first," he stated, "it appeared to be conclusive evidence."

I got up to observe the letter, which Peake had placed upon a table; and Tarrant's tall form bent over my shoulder. It was but a note, yet the few words were heavy with meaning:

Mr. J. T. Rowrer,
New York. Oct. 16.

Sir —

Your unbearable insolence in the theft of my invention is no longer to be borne. The typewriter is mine alone. I shall not put up with your insolence or your lies. I shall obtain a final confrontation before the day is out.

(Miss) Josephine Studd

As he read these combative words, Tarrant shook his head. "The confrontation was final indeed," he said. "May I see the envelope?"

It was in every way ordinary, although soiled and somewhat worn. Evidently it had been torn open in haste. The outside bore the usual postage and also a Special Delivery stamp. Tarrant subjected it to a close scrutiny. "The postmark is much blurred," he announced, "but it is possible to distinguish 'New Yo' and 'Oct 16'; nothing else can be read. The handwriting undoubtably is that of the enclosure. Here is plainly the motive for the crime."

"I thought so," groaned Peake. "And when we discovered that the fatal bullet had come from Rowrer's gun which lay across the hall from the body, quite close to the front doorway, I caused his immediate arrest."

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"There is, of course, a letter-slot in the door, Peake?"

"What?"

"A slot in the door where letters may be slipped into the hallway from outside. When the man and his driver first entered, the letter was picked up from *within* the house," said Tarrant shrewdly. "It is therefore necessary that the postman should have some means of placing it inside when the house was allegedly empty and the premises locked. The slot is there, then?"

"Yes, yes, it is there. . . . Rowrer proclaimed his innocence, they always do. Even before he was taken away, he proposed a suicide theory to us. Very unconcerned he was — a cold, sneering brute. His hypothesis was that the woman, having met her match in his superior ingenuity, came to his house in his absence (gaining entry, no doubt, by breaking in at a window) and had committed suicide there deliberately, for no other purpose than to expose him to scandal and ruin."

"This Rowrer, he is a quick-witted man, then?"

"I should not think so. No, he seemed slow-witted to me."

"Hah! We have him! You must keep him close! How could he invent such a theory on the spur of the moment unless he had craftily prepared it beforehand? No, no, Peake; I am commencing to see his design. I feel that I am already in a position to offer you some slight encouragement."

At these words the inspector's eye became brighter. "Can you blame me," he asked, "for such an arrest? Consider the damning train of events. First, there is the unquestionable evidence of a bitter hatred between Rowrer and the woman; indeed he does not deny it. Then her death by violence occurs within his walls, she is murdered by his own gun (which he is also forced to admit), and finally the weapon is far across the room from the victim, where on account of the hall furniture it is impossible for the person stricken down to have thrown it. What more can one ask?"

"There is still an important point to be ascertained," Tarrant suggested. "At what time was Miss Studd attacked?"

"I do not know," the other confessed confidentially. "We cannot make sure."

"What! Is your surgeon not a competent man, then?"

"Oh, he is perfectly competent. The woman did not die until early yesterday evening. But because of the nature of the fatal wound, it is impossible to determine how long she may have lived after the murderous attack upon her."

"How do you know, then, that she was not shot before Rowrer's alibi commences? Say, on the fifteenth?"

"No, no! I am at my wit's end," cried Peake. "Have you forgotten the letter? It was written on the sixteenth by her own dating and, still more,

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she had to mail it on that day, for it has passed through the post office and bears a cancellation of the sixteenth."

Tarrant's eyes gleamed sharply in his lean face. "I should not think so much of that," he assured the policeman.

"You should not? Can there be any other explanation? To suit the facts?"

"I should say there might be."

"What, then?"

"In my work," Tarrant reminded the inspector, "one of my foremost axioms is that when the impossible has been eliminated, what remains, however improbable, must be the case. . . . But I will not say more on this point just now."

Peake seemed once more immersed in gloom. "The position of affairs is worse than you suppose," he muttered. "We have found the train conductor with whom Rowrer travelled to Boston on the fifteenth and, as luck would have it, the same conductor returned to New York the next day upon the train again used by Rowrer. He swears to the man's arrival in Boston, where he indulged in an altercation on the station platform, and moreover this conductor took up Rowrer's ticket on the return trip just outside the Boston limits. In the short time between when he reached Boston and when he left it, there was no opportunity for him to make an extra trip to New York and back again; as you know, the plane service is still irregular and there were no planes yesterday that would have served. It is only too clear that from noon on the fifteenth to almost midnight on the sixteenth the man was miles away from his home. And whatever you say, no jury will deny that the letter shows the woman to have been killed during that period. Moreover, we have now discovered that a side window in the porch of the house *has* recently been forced from the outside and indeed it was left unsecured by the intruder. Worst of all, Rowrer was brought back to the scene just before I left this afternoon and he succeeded in demonstrating how the gun could have been conveyed across the length of the hallway to the position in which it was found, if it had been used at the place where the body fell."

"I see. He invented some mechanical device by which to accomplish this. The argument is then that the woman, also being an inventor, could have done the same. I suppose there is a large excavation to one side of the Rowrer house?"

"My dear Tarrant!"

"Surely from what you say nothing could be plainer."

"There is just such an excavation, although how you could know of it passes my comprehension." Peake wiped a hand across his forehead. "I have no doubt you will now tell me the nature of the device by which the gun was moved."

"I believe I may hazard a guess," replied Tarrant with a smile. "It is likely that a strong cord was loosely

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tied to the gun, then run out through the letter-slot in the hall door, to end where it was secured to a pair of bricks suspended above the excavation close by the front porch. When the gun was dropped at the farther end of the hallway, the weight fell into the excavation dragging the gun across the floor of the hall and around any intervening furniture; it would hit the slot with considerable force, falling to one side as the cord was torn loose, which then disappeared through the slot and down into the excavation. You discovered the bricks outside, at the bottom of the hole, no doubt?"

"Not the bricks, Tarrant. A heavy pressing iron."

My friend shrugged off the amendment. "It might have been a crowbar," he remarked nonchalantly. "The dodge is an old one, it has been used many times."

"I thought it clever of Rowrer, I confess, to have worked it out without prior knowledge of its use by the woman."

"It is an interesting point."

There ensued a short silence, during which Peake lifted the telephone and spoke with his headquarters. Tarrant sat silently, with sunken head and drooping eyelids, his long slender fingers pressed against the sides of his chin; the pose was deceptively somnolent and from past experience I knew how tense concentration was indicated. As Peake put down the receiver, he stirred and addressed the inspector.

"Let us sum up the case *in favor* of the man you arrested. He left New York on the noon of the fifteenth and was not again in the city until approximately midnight of the sixteenth. Meantime Miss Studd had written an abusive letter to him which is dated on the sixteenth not only in her own handwriting but also by the postal authorities; and we know that she went to his house at about this time. The house was locked but there are marks of a forced entry through one of the windows, so it is plain that she might have entered in this fashion. She could not know how strong an alibi his absence constituted and, being at her wit's end, decided to commit suicide upon his premises, thus bringing her enemy down amid the ensuing ruin. To this end she procured his own gun, which of course was within the house. It occurred to her that the gun must not be found near her body and her inventive brain suggested to her a mechanical device for moving it away after she fell. She arranged this device and then, taking her stance in a spot from which it would be impossible to *throw* the weapon to its final resting place, she shot herself with it. With little or no previous experience of suicide she unfortunately inflicted not only a fatal but a most painful injury; nevertheless she eventually expired after hours of agony, no doubt consoled by the reflection that the very extent of her sufferings would make it more difficult for her adversary to

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escape retribution. The most telling point in support of this theory, I notice, has been passed over entirely by the investigators; it is the presence of at least one light burning in the hallway when Rowrer and the cabman first entered. It would seem most unlikely that the man had left this light on when he departed for Boston, to burn uselessly throughout his absence, especially as he left in the daytime; therefore it provides evidence of the entry of someone during his absence, and the body on the floor shows plainly enough who the intruder was. That, I believe, is the case you have to meet, Peake, in order to keep hold of your man."

The other motioned to the telephone. "I have not kept hold of him. He is no longer in jail."

"What he has escaped?"

"He has obtained a *habeas corpus*. The Commissioner decided he could be held only as a material witness."

"That is most unfortunate."

"I do not see what other course is open to us. You yourself, Tarrant, have just constructed a defense so airtight that the man would not only be sure of acquittal but would have excellent grounds to sue us for false arrest in view of the evidence supporting him and already in our hands." Peake shook his head mournfully; it was a bad moment for the poor fellow.

"You are being severely tried," said my friend kindly. "But do not yield to utter despair."

"For God's sake, tell me! Do you see any light? The facts are conclusive."

"The facts are as stated," replied Tarrant calmly. "But you forget the importance of site: the same landscape, when viewed from a different perspective, presents an entirely different vista. One question should clear the matter up categorically — *did the heavy box which Rowrer brought home with him have a handle at one end and, if so, was that the end by which Rowrer helped carry it into the house?"*

Both Peake and myself gaped at our companion in astonishment. How this sudden question could be of deciding importance altogether passed our imagination. At length Peake managed a reply.

"It is true. The box did have a handle and the cabman happened to say in my hearing that he had grasped it by the other end."

"Then it is highly probable that the surviving inventor is guilty of this atrocious crime."

"How so?"

"Because he had one hand free."

"But he made no attack with either hand. The woman was dead when they entered; there is a witness to prove that he did nothing of a criminal nature the whole time they were in the hall."

"The case is complete," Tarrant assured him. "You have only to pick up the fellow again and no doubt you will find him somewhere about his former haunts. It is now merely a matter of routine."

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"For God's sake, Tarrant, tell me what mystery has gone on in that dark house!"

"My position is unofficial," my friend said. "I have solved the case and all the facts are at the disposal of the police. I cannot be expected to draw up the actual indictment for them. However, if you wish court-room proof, I have no objection to telling you where to obtain it. If you will ascertain the exact time on the sixteenth when the Special Delivery letter was delivered to Mr. Rowrer's house, you will experience no difficulty in convicting him."

Peake sprang up and wrung his host's hand with the deepest gratitude. When he had hurried out to follow up the crucial clue so generously offered, I said with satisfaction, "I see your reasoning, Tarrant. This man first killed his rival, then left his house and mailed the letter *to himself* later. He could have slipped from his Boston train, say at New Haven, and pushed the letter into the mail coach of another train returning to New York. Thus he purported to show that his victim was alive after he had in fact killed her."

I smiled with some enjoyment; manifestly I had followed Tarrant's keen reasoning almost as rapidly as he had devised it. His next words came as an unpleasant surprise.

"I am afraid, my dear Jerry, that you have produced the very worst solution of all. The letter, though short, is far too long to be a forgery. In addition, Rowrer could not possibly have mailed it to himself from New York; it is a Special Delivery missive which passes at speed through the post office and would surely bear a cancellation of the fifteenth, had it been posted at the last moment before he left. Nor could he have played this trick with a mail train later, for then the letter would have carried the railway mail cancellation, which actually it did not. No, no, the fellow is astute; there was no recourse to such bungling and fumbling."

"Then I do not see how he can possibly be guilty."

"I do not expect that you do. . . . Come, the game is afoot! Put on your weatherproof, my dear Jerry. And you had best bring your revolver with you, too, I think."

"Where are we going, then?"

"To the scene of the crime."

"It is long concluded. The police have trampled all over the premises."

"You know my methods, Jerry. It is not necessary for us to browse about that hallway in order to reconstruct what has already taken place. That is known to me. No, the crime I speak of is the one that *impends*."

"There will be another? Downtown at Rowrer's house?"

"I fancy," said Tarrant, "that our time will be more profitably employed at Kew Gardens. Ah, are you ready to start?"

On our journey through the noisy tubes he would say no more and, burning as I was with curiosity, I

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respected my talented friend's silence. My revolver pressed comfortingly against my armpit; if we were to meet violence, I was prepared. Tarrant, too, carried a formidable blackthorn, the favorite weapon of a single-stick expert. At last we approached our destination, a row of ancient apartment buildings stretching along a forlorn thoroughfare altogether deserted in the tempestuous late afternoon. The light had almost gone and an occasional street lamp shone dully through the drenching dusk.

Tarrant was glancing sharply at the house numbers as we made our way along the street. Suddenly he halted. "I fancy we have arrived," he remarked. "And unless I am mistaken, here comes our man."

Through the dimly lit vestibule before us we could perceive a wiry fellow letting himself out the inner doorway. He held the door open to allow the exit of an enormous and shaggy hound. As he paused to muffle himself against the weather, we had a conclusive glimpse of the pinched and sinister face Peake had earlier described.

"One moment" Tarrant cried, as the man emerged upon the steps. "You are James Templeton Rowrer!"

With a cry the accosted man turned. He glared at us through the rain, making a convincing picture of guilt as he crouched back against the building. But he was a person with a quick decision, too; he slipped the leash from the dog, pointed toward us with a crooked finger and cried, "Sic 'em!" in a sharp tone of command. The huge beast sprang down the steps straight at us, its ferocious mouth agape, with a slaver of rage already upon its lips. Its steel teeth glinted brightly in the dull light, affording a savage and hellish sight as it came on. Its master followed it to the foot of the steps, urging it upon us and then turning to the left to make good his escape.

Pulling out my revolver I ran forward and blew the creature's brains out upon the gleaming pavement, Behind me I heard Tarrant springing upon our assailant's back. "You villain!" he cried. "You shall not escape again!" In a moment I recognized the click of the handcuffs as they snapped about his wrists.

As I came up to them, my friend was still struggling with the helpless and cringing rascal. With a grunt of triumph he drew forth a letter from within the fellow's coat and there in the rain spread it out to read the damning words:

14th. October, 1925.

My dear Miss Studd —

I see that I have been altogether in the wrong. If you will come to my home tomorrow, the 15th. inst., at ten in the morning. I will turn over the typewriter patents to you and make what further amends are in my power.

Yrs. humbly,

J. T. R.

"Of course he had to get this into his possession at the earliest opportunity," said Tarrant, slipping the precious document into his own

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pocket, "and this was the first chance he had to break into the dead woman's home. He could feel no safety so long as *his* letter remained at large. Our duty is clear, Jerry. We must conduct him to the nearest police station and turn him over to the forces of the law. No doubt," he added, "our action will stand us in good stead upon some future occasion. . . . We must be prompt, my dear fellow, lest we keep our cocktail guests waiting."

"My dear Peake," said Tarrant late that night when we had all gathered once more in his sunken living room, "the case was fairly clear from the outset. It became certain when you had described the actions of Rowrer upon entering his house with the cabman. This Rowrer was a dangerous and desperate man, as the nature of his inventions disclosed. Anyone who invents so diabolical a device as steel teeth for a ferocious hound is not for a moment to be trusted by his peaceful fellow-citizens. Having made up my mind from the first on this point, I was well-advised to bring along Jerry and his handy revolver when I proceeded to the scoundrel's capture."

Though his anxieties were a thing of the past, Peake seemed still a little bewildered at the sudden good fortune that was now his lot.

"It is true," he admitted, "that the Special Delivery letter from Studd to Rowrer was never delivered at all to Rowrer's house on the sixteenth; and this in itself had the effect of breaking down his alibi. We know now, of course, that the woman visited him — at his own invitation which you have turned over to us — on the morning of the fifteenth and was killed at that time, before he left for Boston. But it is beyond my understanding how you came to these conclusions at a time when his story was so well supported by the evidence at his house."

"With circumstantial evidence," replied Tarrant slowly, "it is always well to consider that it may indicate just the opposite of what it appears to show. Would this acidulous and mannish spinster have committed suicide? I think not. And when we have reached a conclusion from logic, the next step is to view the evidence and impartially to see where and how it supports the solution already presented by reasoning.

"What was alleged to support the suicide theory? That a forced entry had been made into the house, that a light had been turned on in the owner's absence, that a gadget had been arranged in order to move the position of the lethal weapon after its discharge. None of these circumstances point definitely to suicide; every one of them might as easily have been set up by Rowrer before he took his departure and thus tell us plainly that murder had not only occurred but that much thought and premeditation had gone into the plot. So far we balance evenly between the two explanations; but when we hear

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of the behavior of Rowrer upon entering the house, there can be no further question as to which hypothesis we must choose."

"In heaven's name, then, what did he do that disclosed his villainous guilt?"

"The testimony of the cab driver was especially clear; he is an observant man and would go far in your force, Peake. . . . It was what Rowrer did *not* do that disclosed his guilt."

"What did he not do?"

"Sheer simplicity, my dear Peake. He entered the hall, he deposited his end of the heavy burden, he picked up a letter from the floor, he went to observe the body, he returned to a seat across the room, he telephoned the police, he offered a packet of cigarettes and smoked one himself. He did nothing else whatsoever. And there was something very essential which he did *not* do."

"What was it, then?"

"He did not open his letter."

For a moment we sat stupefied at Tarrant's brilliant reasoning. "Impossible!" cried Peake. "It was already opened when the police took it from him upon their arrival."

"Precisely. If it was open then and had not been opened since the traveller had returned to his house, then it must have been opened *before* he picked it up from the floor. But the envelope was plain evidence that it had been torn open and the mailmen who deliver Special Delivery letters do not treat their consignments in any such fashion. It became manifest, therefore, that the man had picked up *an already opened letter* from his hallway. How did it get there?"

"I confess I do not see."

"Of course Rowrer himself dropped it at his own feet when they entered with the cumbrous box. That was the significance of the handle. By this means one of his hands was left free to produce the missive from his overcoat pocket and surreptitiously let it fall to the floor, with the appearance of having been there all the time."

"But the date, Tarrant, the date! Rowrer could not have had in his possession a letter stamped in New York at time when he was in Boston. The letter was stamped the sixteenth."

"An old artifice," said Tarrant quietly. "I have run up against it before. It was used in the singular adventure of General Gotchew of Hoaxly New Place and again in the matter of the Sultan of Cambodia's ordinary ocelots. The letter was dated and cancelled in October sixteenth of 1924, *exactly a year previously*. You will recall that no year-date appeared; it had been purposely blurred off the cancellation mark and never put upon the letter itself, a circumstance that undoubtedly suggested the whole conspiracy to Rowrer's mind. The cunning rogue had kept this evidence carefully hidden for a full year while his plot

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matured. *There* is premeditation, if you like!"

"Amazing, Tarrant, amazing!" Once more Peake advanced across the room and wrung my friend's hand heartily.

"I take no credit for it," returned the other modestly. "The matter has been merely the impersonal one of drawing the required deductions and following them to their only logical conclusion."

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In the November 1944 issue of EQMM, we introduced you to Máximo Roldán, the great Mexican manhunter created by Antonio Helú. At that time we told you that Roldán was not only a detective of Prince Rénine ability but also a thief of Lupinesque audacity. In this first Mexican detective story ever to appear in the United States, Roldán solved an intricate and baffling murder to prove—in his own inimitable way—that crime does pay: for by solving the murder Máximo Roldán was able to pocket 10,000 pesos in jewels—thus combining (bloodhound) business with (pilfering) pleasure. The wages of sin, in Roldán's lexicon of larceny, is—detection.

Now we bellamy[1] into Time, delving into Máximo's past to seek the origin of his double life; and we come up with Roldán's initial transgression. It is called, appropriately enough, "Professional Début"; and just as appropriately, it could be subtitled "How Máximo Roldán Ceased Being One of the Most Honest of Men and Became Perforce a Thief and a Murderer."

We call your attention to a truly remarkable scene in "Professional Début." Roldán, arrested and in the grip of two policemen, is on his way to jail; facing disgrace and ruin, Máximo rises magnificently to the occasion by emulating—nay, but out-Lupining—his spiritual forefather. In one of the most memorable counterattacks in modern detective fiction, Roldán indulges in as fantastic a routine of mathematical double-talk as ever befuddled the wits of the law and earned a felon his freedom. But read the delicious details for yourself . . .

PROFESSIONAL DÉBUT

by ANTONIO HELÚ

(Translated by Anthony Boucher)

I: The Business Administrator

If anyone had assured Máximo Roldán that the following day he would be a thief, he'd have taken it as an insult aimed solely at starting a fight. And if the same person had gone on to say that he would also become a murderer, he'd have called for the attendants and the straightjacket. Not even in his dreams could he imagine himself doing what indeed he was to do. But it was all perfectly simple:

The business administrator of

[1] A coined word suggested by the title of Edward Bellamy's famous Utopian romance, LOOKING BACKWARD, 2000-1887.

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Doña Fernández de Serrano had just opened the safe where the month's collections had been piling up in banknotes, which every thirty days he remitted to Doña Juana, at present in Paris. This was what the administrator had been doing month after month, in the same place, on the same day, almost at the same hour, and always in the presence of Máximo Roldán.

Máximo Roldán was an ideal clerk. He was honest, industrious, and wonderfully glib in his treatment of troublesome clients, who always went away firmly believing whatever he chose to make them believe. The administrator realized that the young man was too clever to remain a clerk indefinitely and was resigned to his eventual loss; but meanwhile he utilized him, relied on him, and was completely unaware of his presence while he went through the monthly routine.

But this time Máximo Roldán's perverse humor, usually under control in the office, prompted him to venture a small joke. Hadn't Proudhon said that property was theft? So he remarked, when the administrator had taken out the banknotes and begun the task of sorting them into bundles. "*Caray,* Don Pancho! What a thief you are!"

It happened so quickly, so simply.

The administrator jumped as if stung, whirled around, and stood face to face with Máximo Roldán. He stared at him with panic and horror and despair. And with no warning (such manners!) he took a revolver from his pocket and brought its butt down heavily on Máximo Roldán's forehead.

Máximo Roldán had scarcely had time to notice what was happening. He saw the administrator come at him; he saw the quick movement of his hand toward his pocket; then came the blow.

He regained his senses in a minute or two. He was lying on the floor and the muzzle of the revolver was fixed on him. He moved slightly to ease his limbs. And he heard a voice saying. "So you caught on, eh?"

He didn't understand. The voice went on, "Very well. I don't know how you did it; but I do know that I can't afford to let you live. Unless you want to come in on it with me; there's profit enough to share."

Máximo Roldán shifted again but didn't answer.

"It's perfectly safe," the other went on. "Nobody, outside of the two of us, can possibly know the amount taken in each month. It's a great deal of money. And a third of it is for us. I'd already thought of letting you in on it — safer that way. Since it's my idea and I handle all the details, I'll naturally get the larger share. You'll take over the books; you understand that sort of thing better than I do."

Máximo Roldán sat up gingerly. He had understood the proposition, but he made no attempt to think it through. He went on listening automatically.

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"You understand — just the two of us. I don't really need your help; I can handle it all myself. But if you'll attend to the books, the thing'll look better. Of course, if you don't want to . . . "

Máximo Roldán shuddered. There was something quietly menacing about the administrator.

"It's up to you. We're all alone, and no one will come here before tomorrow. Remember when we've had target practice in the patio? I can empty all six shots in this pistol and none of the neighbors will think anything of it. You see? It's so easy. And then simply dig a hole in the patio . . . You can see how well it will work. Tomorrow no Máximo Roldán. Also no money from the collections — not a centavo. Máximo Roldán stole the money, of course, and made his getaway. How does it strike you?"

Now Máximo Roldán really began to think it through.

"That might be the best way at that," the other went on. "With what I've already piled up, plus all of this month's money, I'll have enough. And when you've been proved to be the thief . . . "

"Listen, Don Pancho."

"Yes?"

"I'll help you."

"So? It appeals to you? But the more I think it over, you see, the more the other way appeals to me."

Máximo Roldán felt a slight chill. "You couldn't do that, Don Pancho."

"No? Why not?"

"Because it wouldn't work out to your own advantage. Sooner or later the truth would be bound to come out. If you give up your position here and go off to enjoy the money, there'll be suspicions and they'll check up and find out the truth. Or if you try to carry it off by staying on here a few months, they'll get suspicious when Máximo Roldán shows no signs of life anywhere; they'll begin checking and end up by finding out the truth anyway."

Máximo Roldán stood up and went on, "Whereas if I help you . . . Look, Don Pancho: If I help you, nobody'll ever know what you've been up to. I'll straighten it all out: income, receipts, entries, letters — everything. We can hold out half the net and split it three parts to you and one to me. In a few months, Don Pancho, you'll be as rich as Doña Juana herself."

There was a pause. The administrator lowered his revolver tentatively.

"Now," Máximo Roldán went on rapidly, "let's fix it up properly. I'll sign a paper obliging me to help you in everything. What do you think of that? No, don't worry; I'm not asking *you* to sign anything. Your word's enough for me."

"That's fine. But I'd rather you didn't sign anything either."

"No, but I shall, Don Pancho. Thank you, but I insist. I want you to feel complete confidence in me."

"But I do already."

"Give me some paper, Don Pancho."

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"All right, all right. If you must. . . "

The administrator set down the revolver to hunt for paper.

In an instant the revolver was in Máximo Roldán's hand, aimed steadily at the administrator.

"And what do you say now, Don Pancho? Raise your hands — that's it. You're going to oblige me by leaving here in front of me, going downstairs, and walking up to a policeman. Get along."

The administrator, his hands in the air, seemed to be choking on his rage. Máximo Roldán had completely recovered his poise. "Get along with you, man! What's the matter? What was that you were saying about six shots from this pistol? Something about no one would pay any attention to them? Not a bad idea. Though come to think of it, I shouldn't really care if people did notice. You're a thief; if I should happen to shoot you while protecting Doña Juana's interests — because you know what, Don Pancho? I have the oddest itch to shoot you down right here, as a robber."

"But . . . but people would think you'd murdered me . . . to rob me."

"Rob *you?* A thief like you? But maybe you're right; after all you are the manager and it might look as though — keep your hands well up, Don Pancho! — as though I were the thief. But I do feel that itch . . . You're sure they wouldn't notice the shots? Quite sure? Don't move! There. Now tell me how much money you've stolen up to date — in round numbers, of course. Do try and remem — I told you not to move, you fool! If you so much as stir a muscle again, I swear I'll — "

The two shots came in rapid succession.

The bullets went straight into the administrator's chest. He fell forward on his face, twitched a little, and lay still.

Máximo Roldán stood petrified. He had not expected this, no matter how much he had joked about shooting. This was back in the days when he didn't understand about such things as hair-triggers.

And now what? Call the police? Run away? Running away meant confession. But calling the police — wouldn't that mean possible arrest and imprisonment, no matter how innocent he was? After all . . .

He looked at the table. On it lay fifteen or twenty bundles of banknotes, of a thousand pesos each. Fifteen or twenty. . . Fifteen or twenty thousand pesos. How much *were* fifteen or twenty thousand pesos? Never mind exactly; they were plenty. And there was something he could do with every single one of them!

He had just killed a man in self-defense. In self-defense? Well, it amounted to that. But the only thing that counted at the moment was staying out of jail. If he notified the police, he'd be arrested for sure. The most innocent policeman could never bring himself to believe that the ad-

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ministrator was a thief and Máximo Roldán a righteous defender of property. No, he would not call the police.

Flight. The body could stay there all night without being found. The first employee wouldn't arrive until ten the next morning. Confusion and routine would take up another two hours. It was now four in the afternoon. He had, then, eighteen or twenty hours to work out a plan and get safely away. Just for the time being, of course, until the situation cleared up.

He looked at the table. *Caramba!* Could *that* be twenty thousand pesos? How little room they took up! You could very nearly get all those banknotes into a cardboard shoebox. In a handbag — why, there'd be nothing to it. There'd be room left over — for a change of linen, for instance.

All right. The point was that he had to decide on some way of lying low for a few days. But where? This crook here would have killed him with impunity and framed him as a thief to boot. And wouldn't have had to lie low at all. There's a crook for you! And that's the man who was about to enjoy these twenty thousand pesos? Indeed it is a mad world, my masters! Himself now, he deserved that money a hundred times more. . .

With twenty thousand pesos . . . What the devil! With twenty thousand pesos he could lie low in style and comfort. He could . . . well, for instance, he could take the night train for Vera Cruz and sail the next day for Havana, or New York, or Europe.

Máximo Roldán, murderer. So why not thief, too? Now for a handbag, a little handbag . . .

Come now, this is silly! Put the money in a handbag just to leave this office? In your pockets, man, in your pockets!

Feverishly he seized the bundles of banknotes and crammed them into the pockets of his trousers, of his coat, wherever they would fit.

Four-thirty. He would go home and get whatever he needed for his trip. He opened the drawer of the desk and took out a railway guide. The night train on the Mexicano line left at 8:55 He had time — a little over four hours. The important thing, for the short time he must remain in the city, was to act naturally, as though nothing had happened. First, go home. Then carry on as usual: call on the girl friend at seven — Hold on! That might . . . He tossed a coin and called *eagle*. It came up *sun*. Skip the girl friend. She wouldn't do anything that night to check up on why he'd stayed away; and by the next day, when the whole city knew that he was a thief and a murderer . . .

All right. Was there anything left to do in the office? He covered the body with an overcoat from the rack. He combed his hair, lightly brushed his suit, and checked his face in the mirror; all normal. He closed the

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office door behind him, turned the key twice, went out in the patio, tossed the key up on the tiled roof, and went downstairs to the street door. This he locked as usual, and then set out for home.

It had all happened so quickly, so simply.

Máximo Roldán, who the day before had looked upon himself as one of the most honest of men, was now a thief and a murderer.

II: The Sweetmeat Vender

A light drizzle began to fall. It spattered on the sidewalk, which was soon covered with water. His rubber soles made walking difficult. He skidded. With great difficulty he reached the corner and hailed a bus. He felt his way toward it hesitantly, his arms stretched out to take hold. Seeing his difficulties, the conductor and a passenger held out their hands to help him.

"Do you feel ill, sir?"

He was surprised. "No. Why?"

"You look so pale, I thought . . ."

The devil! Were the signs of what he had done so evident on his face? He kept his head lowered to hide his features. He raised his hand to his trouser pocket to take out the fare. His fingers encountered the bundles of banknotes. The coin purse was underneath. Should he take out the notes to reach the purse? *Caramba!* This *was* a fix. With some deftness he might take out one single bill and pay with that. Pay carefare with a banknote? And supposing it should be a twenty, or a fifty, or even a hundred peso note? The most ingenuous of conductors would think him mad, even if he failed to guess the truth. He made an attempt to reach his purse. But the pocket, well stuffed with notes, left no room even for his fingers.

At last he made his decision. "Sorry. Left my money at home. I'll get off at the next corner."

The sweetmeat vender watched him get off the bus. She watched him put one foot forward, draw it back, advance the other, bring the two together, and spread out his arms to keep his balance. It seemed an original improvised dance, so ridiculous, so grotesque, that the sweetmeat vender began to laugh. Suddenly she saw him skating along the wet sidewalk. And she saw him skate straight at the table of her jellies.

"Hi! You there!" she called.

He paid no attention. On he came, faster now, his head lowered, his feet skidding about, right for her stall.

"At least let me get the table out of the way!" she managed to yell.

But her attempt to save the table was in vain. With all the weight of his body he struck against the glasses. The jellies shot off like bullets and splattered on the pavement.

Máximo Roldán felt himself plunge headfirst into the table, scatter its contents, and land on something sticky. And at the same time he felt two claws fasten on his shoulder and shake him while a voice

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yelled in his ears, "Now you pay me for those jellies!"

He managed to free himself, rise to his feet, and confront the voice.

"You pay me for those jellies or I'll call a cop!"

Passersby were already bunching around curiously. A woman — she must be the vender of all those things lying on the sidewalk — stood with arms akimbo and glared at him accusingly.

"All right now: you pay me or I'll send you to jail."

Máximo Roldán shuddered. "Calm yourself, madam."

He could use a little calm himself. He raised his hand to his pocket. He'd have to take out a bill and pay, before the commotion grew even worse and attracted the police. And whether the bill was fifty pesos or a hundred, he'd have to tell the woman it was all he had. He managed to get hold of one bill and extracted it cautiously.

"Here you are, madam. It's all I have on me." He held out the bill without looking at it and added grandly, "You may keep the change."

The woman took the bill and examined it. "Change?" She laughed loudly. "Change, he says! Come on, where's the other five?"

"What?"

"You gave me a five. I want ten pesos."

Now what? Only one thing left: to haggle. "Ten pesos! Absurd. The damage can't be worth even five. But you may keep the ten."

He needed all his nerve to keep cool. Clearly this woman intended to profit by the situation as much as the traffic would bear. He turned and started off. But the woman stationed herself in front of him and held him back.

"Listen, mister: it's ten pesos."

"But I told you that five is all I have."

"Then you still owe me five."

Máximo Roldán was at the end of his rope. The nervous indignation which he had prudently controlled for so long burst out now. "You, madam, are a shameless old woman!"

"I'll shameless you, you *robber!*"

The sweetmeat vender had uttered the word robber purely as a matter of course — naturally, without special emphasis, with no intention of saying anything more than just that: *robber*. But she noticed at once that the word struck the stranger silent. She watched him tremble and grow pale. And she heard his voice, quavering with anger, crying out, "Quiet, you wretch!"

The sweetmeat vender grinned to herself. She'd hit on that fellow's soft spot. In earnest now she began to shout, "Robber! Thief!"

And instantly repented. For something horrible, frightful, launched itself at her. Something that seized her by the throat, half-throttling her, and muttered, "Shut up! Quiet! Shut your mouth!"

Then she was free, with equal suddenness, and beheld the other held firmly by two policemen.

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Assaulting the street vender was the surest step Máximo Roldán could have taken for his own destruction. But when he realized this, it was already too late. Two policemen gripped him, one by each arm, preventing an attempt at escape. His compromising position appeared before his mind in all its clarity: The assault of the woman would take him to jail. And as soon as they booked him, they'd find twenty thousand pesos in banknotes in his pockets. Does a man carry around twenty thousand pesos like that, loose in his pockets? Why? What motive? And worse — this was the man who had balked at paying ten pesos!

Máximo Roldán wanted to laugh. The police had just arrested the murderer — without knowing it!

The night train for Vera Cruz? Havana, New York, Europe? Jail my boy; that's where you're going, jail. Unless something might happen en route. Pay the woman and bribe the policemen. Get rid of the money somehow, anyhow.

Well, there was some distance between here and the jail.

In that instant Máximo Roldán began his truly professional career as a thief.

III: The Man on the Other Sidewalk

Máximo Roldán was not handcuffed to either of the two policemen. One of them marching on either side of him was enough to prevent any possibility of escape — escape, that is, by such crude methods as running away. There were other means of escape, even if he were surrounded by a legion of policemen.

Suddenly something attracted his interest. Something that was taking place on the sidewalk across the street. And after two or three minutes of observation, he began to say aloud: "One, two, three, one step to the left; one, two, one step to the right; one, two, three, one step to the left; one, two, one step to the right."

The policemen opened their mouths and stared at him. The one on his left raised a hand to his holster. The one on the right grabbed his prisoner firmly by one arm.

Máximo Roldán went on: "One, two, three, one step to the left; one, two, one step to the right."

The policeman on the right had had all he could stand. "Look, friend. What do you mean?"

"One, two, three, one step to the left."

"Spill it," the one on the left commanded.

"One, two, one step to the right."

Máximo Roldán went on counting, without taking his eyes for a moment from the sidewalk at his right. The two policemen gave up their questioning and instinctively followed his gaze. And then they beheld the extraordinary spectacle that explained their prisoner's behavior:

On the opposite sidewalk, a few paces ahead of them, a man was

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walking in the extravagant manner already described by Máximo Roldán. The two policemen could observe that he took three steps forward, then one to the left, then two more forward, then one to the right, then started in again with three steps forward, one to the left, two more forward, then one to the right, and so on, rhythmically, infallibly.

And suddenly the man turned his head and saw the three men watching him. He smiled. He nodded his head encouragingly and smiled again. But this last smile abruptly changed into a grimace of terror. A grimace directed not precisely at them, but at something a little behind them. And then they saw his extravagant actions undergo a slight change: three steps forward, one to the left, *three* more forward, one to the right . . .

The two policemen gazed at each other. For the moment they had lost interest in their prisoner. Máximo Roldán might, if he had so desired, have made his escape at that instant. But the evolutions of the man on the other sidewalk were beginning to interest him nearly as much as his own freedom.

The steps to the right and the left went on as before, but now with a different rhythm. It was no longer alternatively two and three steps forward, but always three, spaced by the steps to the side.

"Would one of you care to look back and see what's going on behind us?" Máximo Roldán suggested.

The policeman on the right obeyed. His professionally observant eye scrutinized the street behind them.

"Did you see anything?" Máximo Roldán asked.

"No, sir."

"Not a thing?"

"Nothing."

"But are you sure, man? There's nobody following us?"

"Following us? *Caramba!* Wait a second — There's a man just turned the corner."

"That's all?"

"And a little ahead of him there's a man standing looking into a shop window."

"Far behind us?"

"About ten meters."

"Fine. Thanks, officer."

The officer frowned, uncertain whether Máximo Roldán was talking in jest or in earnest. Nevertheless, when the prisoner asked him to look back again a little later, he obeyed.

"Now what do you see?"

"Nothing."

"Still nothing? All right. *Whom* do you see?"

"The same man in front of the shop window?"

"You mean to say he's still standing in front of the window?"

"Yes, sir. Not still; but he *is* standing in front of a window."

"What do you mean, not still?"

"I mean he's not standing in front of the same window. But still he is standing in front of a window."

"Oh. A different window?"

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"That's it: a different window."

"Far behind us?"

"About ten meters."

"That is to say, just as far behind as he was before."

"Yes, sir."

"Fine. Thanks, officer."

This time the policeman began to worry. If his leg was being pulled, he was not going to take it lying down. He turned to Máximo Roldán with a harsh phrase on his lips, but the prisoner's serious preoccupation disarmed him. A moment later he heard Máximo Roldán's voice:

"All right, listen, both of you. There ahead of us, on the sidewalk to our right, is a man devoting himself to the strangest fashion of walking that one can imagine. He is not drunk. A drunkard weaves and staggers; this man walks in a clear, definite pattern. He takes three steps straight ahead, then one to the left, then (when we first saw him) two more straight ahead. When he walked on the right of the sidewalk, he took three steps; when he moved over on the left, he took two. If he's not drunk, you say, he must be mad. But a madman, however harmless a monomaniac, does not usually escape from an asylum with a pistol; nor does his family let him stroll about the streets armed. And this gentleman, if you'll observe his coat carefully, is clearly armed with a pistol. You notice it?"

"Yes, sir."

"We're not dealing, then, with either a drunkard or a lunatic. And a sane man would conduct himself so peculiarly only if he wished to attract attention. He has looked with indifference at all the other passers-by; they mean nothing to him. But as soon as he sees us — *you*, I should say — he smiles, seems relieved, and resumes his extravagant and suspicious actions with fresh vigor. Now a sane man knows that it is the duty of you, the police, to keep an eye on anyone whose conduct seems suspicious. Therefore we may conclude that this gentleman across the street *wants* the police to keep an eye on him."

"Why?" asked the policeman on the left.

"That's what we must figure out. For the moment, will you do me a favor? Look back and see if there is a man ten meters behind us looking into a shop window. There is? Fine. Thanks, officer. But tell me: is it the same man you saw before?"

"Yes, sir," the policeman on the right said. "The same man."

Máximo Roldán walked on between the two officers. "I have a feeling that you two are going to be promoted and decorated for this. . . To sum up: this gentleman who moves in so mysterious a way has now attained his object, which was to call the attention of the police to himself. He achieved this end by a curious and continuous movement of alternating lateral and forward steps. Always moving onward, he attracted your attention by the lateral movements; but if these had their mean-

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ing, the forward steps must likewise have theirs. Here is the first unknown quantity."

As he talked, Máximo Roldán had never let the mysterious stranger out of his sight. The two policemen were absorbed, following with equal eagerness the words of their prisoner and the movements of the other.

"The first unknown quantity. . . To solve for *x*, we must first consider all the known quantities. Tell me, is algebraic calculation part of the curriculum in the police training school?"

The policeman on the left said, "Huh?" but the one on the right explained "He means that math refresher course," and added, "Yes, sir; a little."

"It should be intensive; many of a policeman's problems are, like this, fundamentally mathematical. Now: when our stranger turns around and sees us, he smiles, looks relieved, and walks with more assurance; but then he looks a little behind us, say ten meters back, and sees something that destroys his relief and reassurance. Something so interesting, so intimately tied up with his movements, that these very movements undergo a subtle but noticeable change: previously he had taken three steps on the right half of the sidewalk and *two* on the left; but from the moment that he looks behind us, he takes three on the right, and *three more* on the left side. Obviously it was what he saw in back of us that caused him to increase the number of steps in his pattern. Now what is behind us? Behind us, ten meters back, is a man standing in front of a shop window. You're following me?"

"Yes, sir." It was the policeman on the right.

"We may establish, therefore, that if

$$ls = lm$$

where s represents a step and m a man, then:

$$s = m$$

and substituting known quantities in our equation, we may conclude that the other two steps to which this extra one was added also represent men on this same sidewalk. Continuing the substitution, we find that the three steps which he takes on the right half of his sidewalk denote three more men on the right-hand sidewalk. Therefore this man, who has so intelligently succeeded in communicating to us his intent, is on the trail of five individuals who are distributed as follows: two on the left, which is to say our sidewalk, and three on the right, which is his. He had to attract your attention without any pause or delay by which he might lose sight of his quarry. And the best device he could conceive was his extravagant perambulations. Q.E.D."

The policeman on the left said "Huh?" again and the one on the right said, "You mean you've solved for *x*?"

"There's our unknown quantity, all solved. But we, in our turn, are

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being followed by a *sixth* man, who has observed that we are on the trail and who tries to throw us off whenever you look back. And this sixth individual, according to our eccentric informant, is to be included among those *he* is following and considered a hare, not a hound. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," the policeman on the right answered. "The gentleman on the righthand sidewalk is on the track of a gang of thieves who—"

"Hold on. Did I say thieves?"

"All right, on the track of five or six individuals. But since that's too many for one man to handle, he enlists our aid by his peculiar movements, at the same time telling us how many of them are where."

"You're a smart man, officer."

"Thank you, sir. By means of certain mathematical calculations, we establish that on his sidewalk there are three of the gang, all ahead of us; on our side three more, two ahead and one behind. Correct?"

"Correct."

"And now that we have established that, our next step is to approach the gentleman and ask him what he wants us to do."

"Thereby assuring you promotion."

The policeman on the left gulped and said "What?"

"Your promotion. How do you know that he isn't a plainclothesman from the Security Commission?"

The policemen had not thought of that. Their desire to help the eccentric pedestrian doubled in an instant.

"One more thing," Máximo Roldán interposed. "You've earned your promotion; there remains the matter of winning a decoration."

The policeman on the left was about to cross the street, but the one on the right called him back. By now whatever Máximo Roldán said was gospel. And if Máximo Roldán considered it inadvisable as yet to place themselves at the plainclothesman's orders, then there was lots of time to do so. Máximo Roldán continued:

"We know one of the six individuals concerned. But the other five — where are they? Who are they?"

Máximo Roldán scrutinized both sidewalks as far as the eye could reach. The policemen had the impression he was only confirming what he had previously observed. Their ears and eyes and brains avidly followed his reasoning.

"Walking along on this sidewalk are six couples. Across the street there are as many couples, quite a few single individuals, and one group of three men. That must be our friend's quarry of three. Confirmation? Watch them: every so often they stop, whisper together, look around at the doors and windows and even up at the roofs, and then glance over toward this sidewalk and communicate with someone through almost imperceptible movements of their heads. This someone, according to our hypothesis, must be one of the couples on our side. Which couple? If we follow the glances of the trio, we see that their

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colleagues must be either Couple Three or Couple Four, counting from here. Let us examine these two pairs: Couple Four walks along casually, preoccupied with conversation and heeding nothing save the chance of collision with passersby. The behavior of Couple Three, on the other hand, is most significant: they too examine doors and windows and roofs and seem to answer the all but imperceptible signals of the trio."

The policemen had been confirming with their own eyes the observations of Máximo Roldán. It took sharp eyes to notice it; but the conduct of the trio and of Couple Three did differ noticeably from that of the other pedestrians. They acted "like people looking for a house to rent." This simile, proffered by the policeman on the right, was endorsed heartily by Máximo Roldán.

"Now," he went on, "you may put yourself at the disposal of the man across the way. Now you know which are his quarry. And you can tell him what they are."

The policeman on the left started to protest, "But we don't know—"

"But of course you do. You can tell him that they're conspirators, anarchists. Let us consider the possibilities: A gang of thieves, as you first suggested. But a gang prepares its jobs with the greatest precaution—always alert, expectant, careful to see that no one trails them. Every one of its members is distrust personified; he manages to conceal the slightest gesture, the least movement, the most insignificant detail. Besides, a gang does not set out *en masse* to case a house for a job; that's the work of individuals. But these five are still hunting for a spot; they don't care who sees them; they never look back to see if they're being followed; the mission that absorbs them is so intimate, so out of the ordinary, so decisive that it never occurs to them that anyone else might suspect their intent. Nevertheless the man across the street knows who they are and what they're up to. And now we too know, and are about to join in the pursuit.

"We have canceled out the possibility that these men form a criminal gang. What is the next most likely supposition? A group of conspirators or anarchists. The first question is, why should such a group be interested in this street? Are they hunting a good site for a secret meeting place? Or are they planning a *coup?* Now where does this street lead? To the Stadium. And what is tomorrow? Inauguration Day."

He paused briefly. The policeman on the right gaped as the implication struck him. The one on the left gaped anyway. Máximo Roldán hastened on. "Along this street tomorrow, en route to the Stadium for the inaugural ceremonies, will pass the incoming and outgoing presidents. Now you and I, if we were surveying this street, might be hunting for a good window from which to watch the parade. But consider the number of factions which have

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an interest in assassinating one president or the other, or both. Are five individuals, who are being trailed by the police, apt to be casing this street for any such patriotic purpose as watching a parade? No! These are not only suspects, conspirators, anarchists — *these are assassins!*"

"In that case —"

"In that case," Máximo Roldán hurried on, "your duty is to catch up with the man from the Security Commission and assist him in arresting these five men, assist him in saving the life of the President of the Republic. . . and earning your decorations. And my duty is clearly to take care of the sixth man following us. You agree? I slow down, let him come up with me, turn on him, force him to raise his hands, march him up to the corner, and deliver him to the traffic policeman there. A trifling task, but necessary. For you, officers, there remains the glory and danger of the pursuit of the five assassins. Good luck to you!"

The policemen hesitated an instant, uncertain if under such circumstances one should say goodbye, then hastened across the street. The one who had been on the right turned back a moment and said to Máximo Roldán, "Are you working?"

"At the moment, no. Not precisely. My employer . . . left me suddenly."

"Well you just drop around to headquarters. We'll get you into the police training school."

Máximo Roldán laughed and shook the policeman's hand. "Thanks, officer. But I. . . I was considering another profession. . ."

"That's a shame. Well anyway, if ever you should. . . Thanks for everything. See you later."

Máximo Roldán watched him rejoin his companion and reach the other sidewalk. Then he slowed down, turned and looked about him. There was no lone figure in sight. Nobody looking into a shop window. Four or five couples. One large group engaged in animated conversation. That was all. No single individuals on the other sidewalk either. The man they had been following had vanished. So had the man following them. So, in another instant, had Máximo Roldán.

As he strolled along another street, where people walked normally, he lightly felt his pockets. "Twenty thousand pesos. . ." he murmured. "I've got twenty thousand pesos. . . and my freedom." His mind took up its geographical litany again: Havana, New York, Europe, . . . Mexico. Mexico City, which seemed to offer such superlative opportunities for a young man starting out in a new profession.

His feet took three steps forward, one to the left, two more forward, one to the right. . . "Now I wonder," he said to himself, "just why anyone should do that."

Máximo Roldán shrugged. "Oh, well. I'll see it in the papers tomorrow."

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For twenty years, between 1913 and 1933, Frederick Irving Anderson wrote steadily for George Horace Lorimer, the famous editor, and saw perhaps hundreds of his stories appear in the pages of "The Saturday Evening Post." Surely that is a proud and enviable record — two solid decades of publication in America's oldest living weekly. Yet, despite the plethora of his magazine-published work, Mr. Anderson has only three books of short stories to his credit. Frederick Irving Anderson only three — E. Phillips Oppenheim no less than 39 (to say nothing of the more that 100 full-length novels). Why, in five different years — 1912, 1920, 1923, 1927, and 1929 — Oppenheim published three books of short stories annually!

The paucity of Mr. Anderson's short stories in book form is a publishing phenomenon your Editor cannot explain. The three books have won the respect and admiration of all serious students of the detective-crime genre. They are the BOOK OF MURDER, *which is becoming more and more difficult to find;* ADVENTURES OF THE INFALLIBLE GODAHL, *which is already difficult to find; and* THE NOTORIOUS SOPHIE LANG, *which is almost impossible to find. In a phrase, all three books are "out of print," and in another phrase they are "almost forgotten."*

Something should be done about it. Something should be done to bring a selection of Mr. Anderson's best stories back into book form . . . a movement started, a petition signed, a demand created, a supply demanded. Your Editor hereby signifies his willingness to be party to any scheme (short of nefarious) that will permanentize Mr. Anderson's work between covers.

In the meantime, here is a brand-new Anderson story, rich in detail and double-rich in expression, about those patient pursuers, Deputy Parr and Oliver Armiston.

MURDER IN TRIPLICATE

by FREDERICK IRVING ANDERSON

OVER A THOUGHTFUL pipe on the morning of September 17, Oliver Armiston expressed curiosity as to how an expert, a pundit in the historic art, would go about the job of murder in his own behalf.

"Probably very badly," he offered, experimentally.

Up through the ages men (and women) had made a profession of

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the lethal art, some for zeal and even hope of heavenly grace, and some for pelf. Indeed, the very origin of the term assassin is religious. Murder, said Oliver, is a skilled service, to be hired, like valeting, dishwashing, or fumigating. Like other trades and professions, it becomes overcrowded at times, with consequent fee-cutting and splitting.

But these adepts always do their experting for others. Someone else supplies the motive, they merely do the killing. It isn't even murder, except by a fictitious extension of the criminal code, since killing without motive could not be premeditated. The demand comes from the outside; it is merely a delivery on consignment.

"Do these people ever take a day off and do a job for themselves?" asked the distinguished amateur, stimulatingly.

Parr, the police deputy, sat in his favorite elbow chair by Oliver's desk; his topcoat and jacket were open, his hard hat still rode his round dome, as is expected of a stage detective, and he idly twiddled a ragged stogy unlit, between his fingers. For some time he had been studying the utterly insignificant *object d'art* on the fireplace shelf. After a time he turned his turret-like head on Oliver, and stared through him with the intent eyes of a microscopist.

"Say that again," said the man-hunter brusquely.

"It seems to be a law of nature that experts require external motivation," said Armiston. "There is something fatally prejudicial about motive. Maybe that's the reason, Parr, that clever murderers fail, whereas the stupid ones have a chance." He swung about and faced his rapt examiner. "You probably know more about murder than any other man alive," he said. "How would you go about a job, *in your own behalf?*"

"I know about murderers, yes," replied the policeman. "I have handled hundreds, thousands of them. But about *murder,* no. That is, if I get what you mean. You are talking about the man before the act?" He shook his head. "I have never had a specimen to examine. Unfortunately, they are not available." He smiled grimly over the thought. "By the time I am called in, he is a different person entirely. That's where they fail. It is impossible for them to foresee the psychic change the mere act entails. I use the word entail advisedly. With the murder he becomes another person, a man beyond the pale, a fugitive even if no man pursueth, to be overwhelmed, destroyed by a chance look, word, sound, act. One of the cleverest murderers I ever saw — clever because it seemed to be done so stupidly — was that of a woman housekeeper by a doctor in the Village. I went to tell him about it, and ask him about her. I heard him coming down the stairs to meet me. He paused halfway down, to get his nerves under control for the ordeal. In that

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cautious instant he revealed himself. By what possible system of foresight could an expert — and he was an expert — have foreseen that impulse?" Parr shook his head. "We had the case of a man who succeeded in utterly destroying his victim — she was carried out to sea, in a flood. I got a fur boa, the kind she had worn, and soaked it in a tub of water overnight. It was lying on my desk when the murderer came in to offer help. He saw it. He thought he had failed. He was lost before he could recover himself.

"So when you ask me how I, as an expert, would steel myself against self-betrayal, I say it can't be done, because there is no way of foreseeing chance. There are two hundred deaths a day in this city. One out of every four is investigated. Do you realize what a busy person the Medical Examiner is?" He reached up and took down his private phone, a direct wire he maintained from Oliver's study to Centre Street. He said, after a little pause, "Fetch them up here." He set the phone aside. "I'd undoubtedly be very clumsy at the job," he remarked dryly as he pushed it aside. "I know all the causes of failure. I'd have a fool for a client."

Shortly Morel, who with the cross-matched little Pelts constituted a sort of bifurcated administrative function for the manhunter's mental processes, entered. Oliver's housekeeper was all smiles, Morel being a dashing young man of the stag-line type. On the Deputy, on the other hand, she bestowed a disapproving glare — he looked the part in every line. Morel unwrapped a parcel when the door closed and displayed three bullets, one a .22 extra long, one a .32, and the last a punishing .45. They had been through the microscopist's hands, for bullets have fingerprints quite as readable as human thumbs. The two smaller ones were newcomers. But the .45 was a repeat; its picture was in the gallery. Its land-marks were identical with those of another bullet that had turned up in the course of a day's work three months previous. There is an odd theory about guns and those who use them. It runs that a gun which has killed one man is prone to do it again, as if, like human beings, one act of accomplishment invites another.

"Who was it?" asked Oliver, staring at the exhibit.

"We don't know," said Morel. "A man in the river."

"Which one killed him?"

"None of them. He was dead before they were fired."

"Drowned?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"We don't know."

The man certainly didn't kill himself. Why waste three shots on him, from three different guns, one with a record, after he was dead? Did three men fire the three shots, as if to share the jeopardy? Or did one man pick up three guns in succes-

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sion?

Morel here produced a second packet, from which he extracted the wadding of a blank shell. Four shots had been fired, one blank.

"It looks like a formal execution," said Oliver. "Military," he added, glancing keenly at the others. "One shell is always blank in a firing squad — so no one can swear he fired the fatal shot."

"But he was dead before the shots were fired," interposed Parr pleasantly. "Now if you wish to examine into the mind of a murderer before the act, here is a mind worth looking into. Here is another fact worth considering. He took pains to have the body recovered. He dumped it in the Harlem River. The tide never gets out of the Harlem River. It swings back and forth between Spuyten Duyvil and Hell Gate twice a day. Let us assume he knew what he was doing." He looked keenly at Oliver. "Let us assume your expert was taking a day off, and doing a job for himself."

Morel said, "He tied a block of salt, rocksalt, to the body, to sink it. It's an old trick. The body comes to the surface days later, when the salt dissolves."

"Why go to that trouble?" cried Oliver, "Why not tie a rock or a grate bar for weight, and be done with it?"

"Maybe he didn't want to be done with it," said Parr. "There's expert-ing for you!" He took up the bullets and examined them. "Everything here is obvious," he said. "They are obvious to us. They were probably meant to be. It rather suggests, doesn't it, that he wanted a little publicity? Murderers are like actors — they crave press notices."

"With the police!"

"Through the police," answered the Deputy. "He dressed it up, so it would get into the papers. Sort of gentle reminder to his followers. As if he said, 'You know what happened to A. This is what happened to be B. Now, C, D, and E, watch your step.'"

"What happened to A?" asked Oliver.

"The same thing, three months ago." Parr held up the .45 bullet. "This one was from the same gun. The others were different. Why change two, and not the third?" He paused for answer.

"Publicity," said Morel.

"It makes a very good story," agreed Parr. "I'll give it to the press. Usually," he added with a smile, "we like to go along with these people, to see where they are going."

"Does the cause of death correspond in each instance?" asked Oliver.

"In so far as utter absence of apparent cause is concerned, yes," said Parr. "That doesn't disturb us, however. There are methods, as you know, that elude even such an avid dissectionist as our medical examiner. The fashionable one, just now, in detective fiction, is to produce an embolism by injecting an air or gas bubble into an artery. Cyanide has

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rather gone out — it leaves its trace — and in real life it takes more of the stuff than in fiction. This happens to be real life."

"No marks of any kind?" pursued the amateur.

"Now we arrive," said Parr. "There are marks, yes. In both cases, the hands, arms, and face were spotted — like a rash. It was much more apparent in the first case than in the second. Dr. Wortly was very much excited at first. He thought he had stumbled on incipient typhus! That would have been a story for the front page! He made a number of blood tests, and such bacteriological examinations as he could." Parr shook his head. "I think he was disappointed. I think he had begun to hope that he had stumbled on a couple of cases of typhus to experiment with in his laboratory. He's got test tubes filled with the most virulent disease germs that he treasures above rubies. Not being learned in his degree," said Parr, "I suggested maybe the two cadavers had been journeymen house painters in their day, and had been putting on blue or purple paint in a high wind with an air brush. Perfectly workable surmise," chuckled the manhunter, "except it wasn't paint — it didn't come off."

He yawned and arose. He wrapped up his precious specimens and put them in a pocket.

"Well, Oliver, there's the fertilizing germ," he said lazily. "I think this might be the expert you're talking about, doing an occasional job for himself on his day off. If it is, I'll warrant he's got a fool for a client."

Like Adam of old, Parr the Deputy had indeed many children — flatties, dicks, guns, bulls, a moll or two, and, yes, stools, and highbrow scientificos, among other categories, to the number of nineteen or twenty thousand — but in particular, he had Morel and Pelts. They were as different lobes of one brain. Morel for the most part he had always with him, a sort of Ganymede to his immediate thoughts. Back in the shadows, beyond the immediate circle of his candle-burning, lurked Pelts, a shabby little fellow who had only one fault — he was hard to call off. When the Deputy walked abroad the little fellow, looking anything but a policeman, scouted the points and flanks. When a big case came to its inevitable stone wall, when all clues ran up blind alleys, there was always the comforting thought that Pelts was still out. Until he came slinking in, and curled up, wordless, in a dark corner, all was not lost.

About four that afternoon Pelts came in for a fresh sniff at Exhibits A, B, and C in the .45 case — as the affair of the two unknown men found swinging back and forth with the trapped tides of the Harlem River had been christened. He had on his make-up, if such it could be called. He was an ol' clo' man, no

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more sanitary than the law allows, attired in several layers of his stock, with a pleasing display of wares draped across one arm and a nest of hats from fair to hopeless on top of his head. Rookies grinned at him and winked at one another; uneasy prisoners who were left sitting for hours, almost for days, it seemed, to take counsel of their own forebodings, eyed him apprehensively as he passed through the halls of Centre Street; he passed on, and, with the privilege of a bootblack, pushed open the "big" door leading to the source of all power, and moved on into the inner sanctum, without even a by-your-leave from the white-collared gentleman on guard. Nor did he look at the scowling Deputy, or the pensive Morel who sat against the light of the tall windows. He took the sniff he had come for, of Exhibits A, B, and C, and quite as unceremoniously departed. One door shut with a soft thud, a second door shut with a soft thud.

"If that fellow could talk," said the Deputy — and left the utterance hanging elliptically in the air.

The fact was, Pelts couldn't talk. He was a roving tight-bellied hound with only a nose for an intellect who brought in bones, sometimes with meat on them. No one had said anything to him about the .45 case. It wasn't necessary; the mere fact that it was for the moment occupying the mind of the chief caused his own perceptions to be tuned likewise. Parr muttered impatiently:

"I wonder what's on his mind. This thing is blind."

"I might try following him," suggested young Morel with a guilty smile. But Parr shook his head. It couldn't be done. He would take cover. But later in the afternoon, through pure mischance, they got a lead. Busby, an operative attached to the District Attorney's office, came in with some papers, and in the course of passing the time of day he asked what Pelts was doing in the "alley."

The "alley" was a ramshackle block in Lafayette Street, hard by the courts and prison, the abode of gentlemen of the law, bailiffs, process servers, runners, and ambulance chasers. There were more telephones in that nest of rookeries than in any other block in town, and there were almost as many tears shed there between daylight and dark as there were across the street. It was the region of spurious hope for the hopeless.

"He's a runner," reported Morel incredibly the next day. The young man had smoked a social cigarette with some of his fellow social registerites on the D.A.'s staff, his feet in a dusty window, his eyes on the back street. It was a fact. Pelts had retired from the ol' clo' industry; he was now disguised in the hard-brushed neatness of the seedy; he was on the curb of the alley to pick up such crumbs as fall from the table of misfortune.

"A runner," said the Deputy,

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scowling. He ran over the names of the denizens of the alley in his mind. "For whom?" Morel didn't know. He thought Pelts was free-lancing. He and Morel smiled at each other — not at the aspect of Pelts in a new role, but at the aspect of themselves spying on the shabby little fellow.

"Let him alone!" commanded Parr, righteously. And he turned to other things.

But his thoughts kept coming back to the alley. A dozen times during the morning he looked up and stared at the opposite wall, and said "Lawyers," as if the words were written on his retina like a complementary image.

"Morel," he said, "who's in that block? Mordecai Cortez —"

"Bierstet, his suborner," joined in the ready Morel.

"Sally Levy — Abe Hoster — Winsmore —"

"Hanson — Borsel, the artichoke mouthpiece —"

There was riff-raff, the camp followers of every trial court. But there were among them some of those highly publicized counsellors nominated as brilliant. Parr nodded.

"Something is on his mind," he muttered. He was thinking of little Pelts. He was silent a long time. Then he said abruptly, "Give it another look," and hastily arose and took his departure.

It wasn't exactly cricket, of course. If it had been anyone else but Pelts, the obvious thing to do would be to call him in and ask him what was up. But one didn't do that with Pelts. Pelts probably couldn't have told. So the obedient Morel gave it another look. He had the technique of looking once, and again, and again — and again. It is a curious fact that the most simple, the most obvious, will gradually change, take on new meaning, if you look at it often enough — and at the hundreth view you begin to see something else that wasn't apparent at the first, tenth, or fiftieth examination. Morel found a room opposite, rubbed a hole for himself in the filmed window, and at odd times of the day and night he looked out on the alley. Occasionally he caught sight of Pelts, a drab figure among drabs that hived on the curb.

Every morning magnificient limousines, with cut flowers and liveried chauffeurs, drove up to the musty doorways, and dignified counsellors stepped out, amid awe, almost reverence. They climbed rickety stairways to shabby chambers, to scan the reports of their minions, to listen to stories that awaited the pen of a Dickens, to dispense with learning, ingenuity and cunning; and in the afternoon the brilliant men of the law would drive uptown to take a bath, as if the sordid grime of misfortune were susceptible to soap and water. Mostly these sacred confabulations were on a strictly cash and carry basis, in the hardest of hard money. It was not an unusual sight for an armored car to roll up to the rookeries with shot-gun messengers

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to carry off gold. One of them — Morel thought it was Bierstet who did the suborning for Mordecai Cortez — used police protection, telephoned for a policeman to ride beside him when he went to his bank. To the camera eye of Morel, there were mementoes for the morning line-up among the creatures who came and went in a never-ending parade. But as for Pelts — that aspect of the espionage was a blank. He gave it up.

The .45 case at this stage was purely of academic interest. A tempting police slip had been inconspicuously posted in the board room where ancient reporters and their veteran office boys checked up on the dragnet of police news every moment of the day and night. A floater out of the river was merely a floater — it seldom got as far as the dead hook on a night news desk. But two floaters, three months apart in point of time, but tapped by a slug from the same gun, caused a penny-ante game to cease and telephone lines jingled for a space. But at newsdesks there were mightier events for recording. In the making of publicity, there is a time to sow and a time to reap; and if the hypothetical experts experting in the case of the two .45's were keen for "press," they were lost in the glut of cosmic affairs.

Weeks passed, even months. Time is on the side of the pursuer. The fugitive drinks in fresh courage and comes out boldly again, no longer cowering at a look, a sound, a word. His defenses gradually lower. But all the time, behind the scenes, ceaseless forces are at work, with the patience of builders of coral rock.

"It's a dud," pronounced Oliver Armiston. "It hasn't any 'it.' It's merely two unknown men — unidentified and unidentifiable. The case has its points, yes — that .45! But you can't get any publicity. And nobody will work without publicity, these days — not even you, Parr. What are you doing about it?"

"Waiting," said Parr, placidly.

"For what?"

"Man coming across water," muttered the Deputy.

"Meaning what?"

"Chance," said Parr. His eyes gleamed for an instant and died down. "Someone — or something — always turns up. Maybe not today, or tomorrow, or next week, or next year. But eventually, in murder, the break comes."

Oliver looked at his watch and arose.

"I've got to meet a boat," he said. "I've got a man coming across the water this morning." he grinned. "Maybe he's your man, Parr."

"Fetch him around," invited the other, rising.

"I'm afraid he wouldn't fit — he's been on Deception Island for two years, far removed from the temptations of civilization. It's a whaling station," he explained. "He's a doc-

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tor. And, believe it or not, his name is Whales — Dr. Whales."

They drove downtown together. Parr found the Toxicologist, Wortly, hanging around waiting for him.

"Those spots weren't paint stains, sir," said the scientist plaintively.

"Good Lord! You're not going to revive the bubonic plague, are you!" laughed the chief. He himself had no difficulty in filing away unfinished dossiers for future reference, but these scientificos were harassed with the memory of elephants.

"I'm inclining to escharotics," said Wortly. "A caustic of some kind," He explained in response to a raised eyebrow. "The long immersion precludes detailed analysis. If," he said, timidly, "we could turn up another specimen —"

"Stick around," chuckled the man-hunter. And at that moment the imp of the perverse caused the telephone to buzz. The Deputy gave heed. He grunted, hung up, pushing away the phone, called after the devout scientist, who was going back to his test tubes of bacteria and bacilli.

"Get into your rubbers and gas-mask, Doc!" he cried. "Here it is. The third floater! In the Harlem River!"

Number One was merely the Unknown Man, an extremely common person. Number Two was a Coincidence. Number Three — Parr laughed. He never know it to fail — eventually, the break came. This was the break. He had had the hunch in his bones. He left instructions for Armiston to be notified.

It was not until four in the afternoon that Oliver caught up with them, and it was at the Morgue. By that time Parr was in the throes of a relapse. Everything checked. It was a perfect replica of the other two. And there they came to a stop. It was the same blank wall — only blanker now, with the peculiar insistence of its own reiteration.

Oliver, of course, was delighted.

"You'll get some publicity now, Parr," he laughed, fingering the telltale bullet — that had not been the cause of death.

"Plenty," grunted Parr. He turned to meet Dr. Whales, whom Oliver had fetched along.

"He might help," suggested Oliver gaily. "He is not unversed in your lore — he is a savant with five Ph.D.'s. In his day he has seen police duty in Turkey. He was medico-legal expert for the Khedive of Egypt. For two years he has been sitting on the polar ice cap wiping his mind clear of civilized impressions. It should be a very sensitive surface."

Dr. Whales, a sturdy man of middle years, with a bald head, a torpedo beard, and piercing eyes behind thick glasses, acknowledged the flamboyant introduction with a smile.

"I'm rather out of practice, that's a fact," he said. "What do you want me to begin on?"

"The hands," said Oliver, "Look at the spots on the hands."

Doctor Whales turned to the speci-

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men, and his eye ran over it in detail. It was a professional eye, Parr could see that. He waited, curiously, wondering if perchance there was something in Oliver's suggestion of a mind wiped clean and renewed by a prolonged absence.

"My experience," said Dr. Whales, rather shyly, "has been wholly of the East. Different races — different climate — different crimes." He turned to Specimen Number Three again. "Significances change with geography and the barometer. If I were in Cairo, Egypt," he added, turning away from the slab, "I'd say this fellow had been sweating gold as an occupation."

Blank silence met the mild gaze of the diagnostician. Pelts detached himself, and was gone.

"Sweating gold!" snarled Parr, suddenly ferocious with astonishment.

"Yes," said the ex-medico legal expert to the Khedive. "It's the spray of the acid they use — nitro-hydrochloric. The purple comes from the gold in solution." He looked at the startled faces curiously. "It's a common crime in the East — very easily spotted — no pun intended. I assure you! Over here I suppose you don't encounter it — no gold in circulation."

"But there is!" cried Oliver, exultantly. "There are tons of it — tons of it — being hoarded!" He turned triumphant, on Parr. "Parr," he cried. "This is the man coming across water!"

"Pelts! Pelts! Where is that blasted tramp?" cried the Deputy. Pelts was gone, like ice on a pond.

But he wasn't gone far. Before they got downtown he had finished his abrupt errand and stood waiting before Parr's desk, an abject figure. Parr grunted. Morel smiled. Oliver nudged his guest and winked. They all sat down. Pelts unbuttoned one coat, two coats, three coats; and from beneath a paper vest, he produced a bulky package which he laid on the desk.

"I just borrowed it," he said apologetically. "I got to take it back, if it ain't right."

"Right? What do you mean, right?" demanded Parr. He tore off the paper. It was a heavy .45 automatic.

"It's a cop's gun!" snarled the Deputy.

"Yes, sir," admitted Pelts.

"You're not meaning to tell me —" Parr glared.

"No, sir. I was just wondering. He happened to be on station reserve, and sleeping — I just borrowed it." Pelts wetted his lips. "I left my own in his holster, so he won't notice."

"What cop?"

"Name is Wickert — young cop — in the 17th precinct —" he paused.

"What about him? Out with it!"

"He had some spots — on his arms. I saw him playing handball one day —"

"And you've been tailing him, eh?"

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"Yes, sir."

"In the alley?"

Pelts swallowed, nodded.

"What was he doing in the alley?"

"He's bodyguard for a lawyer."

"What lawyer?" demanded Parr, rising.

"Bierstet," said Pelts.

Parr took up the gun and beckoning Pelts, departed to the realm of Benson, the ballistics expert, to whom the internals of a rifled barrel were as engrossing as germs to the toxicologist. In five minutes they returned.

"The gun is *right!*" cried Parr, the gleam of exultation in his eyes. "Pelts! If you had my good looks, you'd have my job! Morel, this yellow dog, Wickert, will be outside in a minute. I've had him brought here. Fetch him in."

Wickert was a handsome young cop, just out of the police training school, lean, clear-eyed and graceful from hard conditioning. He came in jauntily. He had been summoned to the Front, which might mean anything an ambitious rookie could wish, preferably plain clothes. His jauntiness wilted a little at the sight of several civilians sitting there. At the sight of shabby little Pelts, he looked startled. But he came to a salute before the Deputy's desk very trimly. The gun lying there meant nothing to him. There was a thick silence. His eyes came back to the gun. It was one police gun in a thousand — twenty thousand. One arm moved imperceptibly until he could feel the bulge of the holster at his hip. He drew a careful breath, stood more rigid.

"Take off your blouse, Wickert," commanded Parr.

The man's jaw dropped.

"My — my coat, Mr. Commissioner?" he said.

"Take it off!"

The man took it off. The big gun bulged from the holster at his hip.

"Roll up your sleeves," rasped Parr. Dumbly the man stared about at the rigid audience. His eyes came back to Parr, as if from the hypnotism of that terrible gaze; and he slowly unfastened a cuff. He began slowly to turn up the cuff.

His gaze began to waver. He was staring at the window behind Parr now. The blood drained from his face. Then with a swift intake of breath a cry that rang through the room he sprang backwards, crouching, and drawing the weapon at his hip.

"Don't move!" he commanded, springing to a clear space. "Murder means nothing to me! Lift so much as a finger —" He motioned with the weapon; and quite obediently Oliver, his guest just in from Deception Island, Morel, and Pelts put their hands in the air, and moved over to Parr's side of the room. Parr said nothing, did nothing. He and little Pelts exchanged one of their swift looks of understanding. The man held his position. He was regaining control of his overwrought nerves. He moved to the door, opened it

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softly, his beady eyes never wavering for an instant.

"I'm not alone," he said, in a whisper. "Murder means nothing to us. The first man to come out is a dead man."

None of them moved. He turned — and found himself confronted by two plainclothes men.

"Put up the gun — it isn't loaded," laughed one of them; and they both sprang at once. There was a struggle that instantly subsided, and the prisoner, gasping with realization of the utter and inescapable annihilation that had come on him in the space of an instant, sank limp and green into a chair. Parr arose and picked up the gun and handed it to its rightful owner.

"You think of everything, Pelts," he said gruffly. He turned to Dr. Whales, who in his old element again had gone over to the prisoner and rolled up a sleeve, professionally.

"This is a fresh batch," said the former medico-legal expert to the Khedive trying the purple spots on the man's arm with a fingernail. "They haven't begun to desquamate."

"Did you come all the way up from Deception Island just for this job, Doctor?" asked Parr.

"As a matter of fact," said the doctor, "I missed my English boat at Montevideo — and on the spur of the moment, I transhipped for here to see Oliver. We got in a day early."

"I'm glad you did," said Parr warmly. "Let's see what this fellow has got on him."

They found, among odds and ends in the man's pockets, a $20 gold piece which when examined under a microscope was found to be covered with the minute craters from the etching action of aqua regia. The coin had been sweated; five, possibly ten percent, of its weight had been removed by the smooth microscopic action of the only solute known to science for gold.

The first agony of Wickert's terror subsided, followed by a surly silence. Parr went in to talk with the prisoner later in the evening.

"We don't want you," said Parr. "We want your boss." He paused, but the man gave no sign. "You didn't kill those three poor devils. You merely mussed them up, after the job was done, so as to draw red herrings across the trail. And a very clever job you did of it too. Except for one detail. You used your own gun to sign the jobs with. Now do you want to go before a jury as the man who fired those three slugs — or do you want to come up for trial on the lesser charge as the man who carried out orders, and disposed of the remains after the job was done?" No answer. Parr smoked for a time. He leaned closer.

"What did he kill them for? Were they stealing the stuff they were sweating?"

Wickert said, as if he had been talking all along: "They couldn't keep their hands off it. There were shoe-boxes full of it, in that room

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upstairs. He had to rub them out — that was the only way he could cover himself."

"What did he use?"

"He's got some stuff in a bottle — he carried it in his vest pocket."

"Wickert, we want Bierstet," whispered Parr. "Where does he take that sweated stuff when you go along?"

"He's got a safety deposit box uptown. He makes the trip once a week, every Thursday."

"Have you got nerve enough to make one last trip with him — tomorrow? I want to find a box of it in his possession." When the man drew back, Parr urged: "We'll be right alongside."

At noon the next day Bierstet, known to the denizens of the alley, high, middle and low, as the counsellor who did the suborning for the big fellows, gaily called the police desk for what he was pleased to dub his shot-gun messenger — preferably that young fellow Wickert, if he could have him. He could, and did. Several tough frame boxes strapped with iron, each about the weight a man could handle, were put into the car, and Bierstet and Wickert, gun strapped on outside for publicity, got in and rode uptown.

Bierstet stepped out into the waiting arms of Parr, and a flock of bright young men, headed by Morel, relieved the lawyer of the box he was carrying.

"This way, counsellor," said Parr, invitingly, indicating his own car at the curb. "Or shall I call the wagon and throw you in?"

"For what?" inquired the lawyer, with a sneer.

"Murder — in triplicate," said Parr. "I believe you hold the record of 73 acquittals in first degree murder. You've never lost a case, have you, counsellor? Well, this time you lose. You've got a fool for a client."

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A CRIMINOLOGICAL CHANGE, RICH AND STRANGE

Vincent Cornier is virtually unknown to American fans. Your Editor first made reading acquaintance with Mr. Cornier (pronounced French style, Cor-nee-ay) in THE BEST (ENGLISH) DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR 1929, *in a story titled "The Flying Hat." That was nearly two decades ago. It took all that time to discover the series of stories which we now bring to you — a series rich and strange, a series that warrants in the fullest degree the use of that overworked adjective "different." But first, a few facts about the author: Mr. Cornier was born in 1898 at a place fascinatingly called Redcar, in Yorkshire, England. (We cannot resist warning you that in a creative sense Mr. Cornier could be termed "The Flying Yorkshireman"!) He began to write at a remarkably young age: when he was only fourteen years old, he was already earning a hundred guineas a year, mainly from articles at half-a-guinea each.*

He served in World War I as an airman, then became a newspaperman, eventually wandering all over Europe and the Near East. On his return to London he tried his hand at fiction and beginning in 1926 had his stories published in "Storyteller," "Argosy," and "Pearson's" magazines, in the company of the great — Gilbert K. Chesterton, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and other titans of the day.

Through World War II, "blitzed, battered, and bereft," Mr. Cornier kept on writing — to fulfill his self-appointed period of apprenticeship: "a quarter of a century spent in constant practice . . . then the first novel."

Mr. Cornier's philosophy of work is decidedly out of the ordinary. The clou, as he himself expresses it, is "to tell of that ancient mystery that most men miss: of what things do to people — and to tell of so much in a style uninfluenced by any other writer, past or present."

Now you know something of the man, and knowing something of the source, you perhaps know what to expect in his work. Even so, you should be amazed and enormously delighted. In this first of a new series, never before published in the United States, you will meet detective Barnabas Hildreth. How describe this new detective? The clue (or clou, if you prefer) might lie in a comparison with some famous sleuth of the past: we could say, in all truth, that Barnabas Hildreth carries on the tradition of R. Austin Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke. But there are, we hasten to point out, important

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differences: you will find no academic dryness in the Hildreth tales, no lack of warmth or humor or stylistic richness; and most important, while Barnabas Hildreth is a scientific detective, he deals with scientific material in a more romantic sense than Dr. Thorndyke did. Nothing prosaic or commonplace, not even in the realistically obscure manner that characterizes most of the Dr. Thorndyke investigations: rather, there is something peculiarly exotic in the mysteries Barnabas Hildreth unravels — something that will remind you of H. G. Wells, and the Professor Challenger stories of Conan Doyle.

All of which you will understand more clearly when you read "The Smell That Killed." At least two more tales will follow — "The Cloak That Laughed" and "The Shot That Waited," the latter an extraordinary story of a bullet fired in the year 1710 which wounded a bank cashier in the year 1933!

THE SMELL THAT KILLED

by VINCENT CORNIER

A MAN CALLED Albert Emery, a vagabond racecourse trickster with a criminal record, issued from a common lodging-house in Doncaster and took to the great North Road during the early hours of Sunday, the third of June.

He departed blithely. He was cleaned and furbished and richer by far than was usual with him. His hair was neatly cut, and instead of wearing a stubbly beard, he went clean-shaven. His clothing and his footgear were new — for he had almost "gone through" the Town Moor card, betting heavily with that money he had wheedled and swindled from the fools he had met during the Doncaster summer meeting.

He departed blithely — on a mission of most ancient and romantic sort.

On the Tuesday of the preceding week, during the York spring races, Emery had proved himself a personage of some considerable attraction to a lady, equally as vagabond and wit-living, who traveled with her mother and her grandmother in a caravan — lone-gipsy.

The lady had intimated to Albert that, although she disliked beards and empty pockets, she would be pleased to encounter him again when these defects were remedied. She mentioned that her traveling home would be moving from York, down the North Road, reaching the curve before Sherburn-in-Elmet on the night of June the sixth.

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To that rendezvous, therefore, Albert Emery set his face on this pleasant summer morning. No wonder he walked blithely, as a man will walk to soft arms and love and vagrant wantonings — but he walked to a death that no man had ever died since earth began.

Emery was a handsome and bullish fellow, over six feet in height; a man whose black hair and swarthy face were curiously offset by a nævus of the eyes. A police memorandum concerning those eyes recorded they were dark hazel and had "circles senele" — a kind of pearly encroachment of the eyeballs' blankness to the irises. It was also remarked that Emery's teeth were strong and large and prominent. The hands, police records finally stated, were scarred from an accident with stone during one of Emery's penal servitudes at Dartmoor.

Yet on the morning of Thursday the seventh of June, when his body was discovered in a coppice by the side of the Sherburn-in-Elmet road, none of these identities could immediately be recognized.

The police dubbed the body as that of a man unknown, and even then they had some doubt — for they thought they had stumbled on the miraculous carcase of a god; or a naked shape of translucent golden marble.

There were scientists who would not believe that goblin thing was ever born to life upon this planet. They declared that it was a very wonderful sculpture, or a cast, made in some medium that had been fashioned in a laboratory for the sole purpose of an elaborate scientific hoax.

These *savants* scoffed at the bare idea of a coarse-grained tramp being transmogrified to this exquisite and abiding thing which has come to be called "the catastrophe in clay." That description is peculiarly apt, and it was coined by Barnabas Hildreth, of the Intelligence Service, to provide a heading for the notes he made of the uncanny affair.

It might be inferred from what I have written that the remains still exist, open to examination. They do — they are among the specimens preserved in the anatomical museum of a hospital in London. Enshrined in a glass case, they have their place in the centre of that secret hall.

They are in no sense alarming or horrible. The transparent sarcophagus reveals a perfect body. It is serene, and it has a strange aura of loveliness.

It is a shape that is not more than five feet six inches in length, and all its proportions are in exactest keeping. It is slim and arrow-straight and delicate; colored with a roseate golden tincture, a sherry glow. The texture of its "flesh" is utterly astounding. This is a substance which might be manna — a material having something in comon with the pith of a peeled orange skin. And yet it is as hard as flint! Imperishable, they say.

The face is the face of Bert Emery:

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his face deterged of all its sardonical gravings and all its shadows of low cunning. But there is nothing to be seen of newly-cropped dark hair — that is a curly mane of gossamer filaments as devoid of pigmentation as the finest silkworm gut.

The features are profoundly at peace; they look very young. The lips smile — and show tiny white teeth which are like cuttlefish bone.

The folded hands are very thin and clean. There is nothing about them reminiscent of the prison-calloused ugliness of Bert Emery's great paws — except, whorl for whorl, ridge for ridge, and scar for scar, their finger prints accord with those the police hold as records of the man's living hands. It was from these prints that identity was finally established.

Clothing could not aid; there was no clothing. Neither did the "circles senele" prove of use. On the morning of the seventh, while still the eyes were slightly opened, no trace of these could be discerned. Nor was there any coloring of hazel in the eyes. But there was a queer and beetle-green fluorescence fleeting in the depths of the dead lens, which seemed to have risen from some reflected trickiness of the morning light. Otherwise the pupils were those of the true albino — pink, tinged by faintest violet.

Close to where the body was found there was a scouring of the road surface, as though a floor of water had eaten away the topmost asphalting, to leave coarse grits exposed. And round about this place all things that had been alive and green, all vegetable substances, were grey and brittle and gone to death. Many birds were picked up thereabouts. None had a vestige of plumage remaining, and all seemed to have been bruised, as though they had been taken in a giant clutch and crushed.

The body of Albert Emery had gone to York when I arrived at Sherburn-in-Elmet to meet Barnabas Hildreth. He had examined it, but I had not.

I found him deep in the mystery. He had been helped by the police, who had not let the criminal record of Emery escape them. Their surveillance — both at the York and Doncaster race-meetings — had resulted in a close knowledge of his *affaire* with the lady of the caravan. We visited her, where she sat with her mother and her aged grandfather, on the steps of her home, temporarily parked in the yard of an inn.

She was a finely-made and handsome creature. Emery had chosen well — but her luscious cheeks paled at the sight of Hildreth, and there was something like terror in her bold brown eyes. His effect on the gipsy's mother was even greater. The crone stuck out two fingers at him, a kind of evil-eye "ward," and positively gibbered.

"Black — *black*," she whined. "*El-y setini; setini chal* — out, you black curse — out, you!"

"First time I've been recognized as a son of the Devil," he chuckled

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across to me. "They must know the pater very well——"

"What d'ye want?" The younger woman rose majestically to her feet and, arms akimbo, confronted the Secret Service chief. "Be quick wi' ye—say it! We're not wanting your sort here."

Hildreth, that amazing man, answered something in a language which was curiously liquid of vowel sounds among a cataracting clatter of consonants. I saw the gipsy's face lighten and her eyes become soft. The old, old man looked up and nickered; the old woman dropped her fingers and grinned.

In another three minutes we were all sitting together, comfortably, as though we had known each other for years. All the while this *"yurrugy-hurrugy-clekety-clak"* of gipsy lingo went on, without my understanding a word of it, save for little interpretations, aside, that Hildreth made.

In this way he told me all I have already recounted concerning Emery's relations with the woman, Cora Leggett, as she was called.

I shall never forget that eerie twilight drama. The glitter of green and gold about the caravan, the gleaming grey stones of the old-fashioned inn, and the brown bright skin of Cora Leggett, shining under tears, her blue-black hair shaking down, coil by coil, as she sobbed for the loss of the vagabond whom she had loved.

Hildreth smoothed her head and stood upright. "I know it's hard," he said in ordinary English, "but try not to take it so much to heart."

"I—I thought the world of him," she moaned. "Why should it be—oh, *why!*"

The old, old man suddenly shook his stick and spoke.

"Better off wi'out him, Cora-*alli*—better b'far! He wor demon took . . . I 'eerd it a-coming, screeching an' whistling down fer him: I sawed it—I sawed it i' th' moonleet . . . a girt blue fire it wor, an' all. He wor took, I tells ye—*took!*"

Hildreth slowly turned on the ancient. Again he dropped into Romany dialect and, for all of ten minutes, he cross-examined.

Eventually Hildreth interpreted the old man's story for me.

It appeared that Emery had faithfully overtaken the caravan on the night of Wednesday the sixth and while it stood in a field by the edge of a coppice, he camped for the night in a glade halfway along the same belt of trees, above the stone-walled road. Somewhere toward midnight he and the ancient finished discussing the finances, et cetera—the sterner essentials—of the projected Cora Leggett-Albert Emery combination. Quite satisfied, the old man was making his way back to the caravan when he heard a wild whistling noise high in the sky.

Fearfully glancing upwards, he saw, so he said, a strange blue ball hurtling through the moonlit air. The next instant there was a shock and a curiously cold blast and a fresh, exhilarating scent as of the sea . . .

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the old man retraced his steps and was the first to look upon the naked golden carcass which lay where Albert Emery had been.

He made his signs against evil and all the demons, and went to bed without a word. In his fatalistic scheme of things this was a horror with which he would not meddle.

Then in the *abandon* of his granddaughter's mourning for her lover, and in his slow realization that Hildreth was to be accounted a friend, and not a hated "police," he decided his silence was a burden he could lay aside.

Hildreth turned to Cora Leggett.

"You'll be making south, along the road, for Epsom eventually?"

"Yes."

"Would you like to hear of what I may find out about your Albert's death?"

She nodded and moaned again and caught and kissed his thin hands.

"Oh, yes, *yes* — if you'd be so good, sir."

"Then, wherever you are, Cora Leggett, I shall come to you and tell you all I know." He smiled sadly. "Good night to you all. God be with you."

Quietly we went away. A young woman's crying and the *keening* of the old stayed with us for many yards.

That patch of the roadway which had been excoriated in the process of the tragedy was by this time enclosed within a barricade of ropes. A night-watchman's cabin had been established and "Road Up" notice boards were in position to deflect traffic.

All was part of a clever plan. Local curiosity had been defeated by it. No publicity had been given to the finding of Emery's body — by Home Office direction. The "road works" idea was Hildreth's — and the watchman was a C.I.D. officer from York, Detective-Sergeant Bolsom.

When we arrived at the place he was not immediately to be found. The brazier held a newly-made fire, and red lamps glowed along the rope line, but Bolsom was missing. Then I caught sight of someone dressed in navy's rig clambering back to the road from the coppice. The man negotiated the low stone walling with a care which seemed to me to be decidedly exaggerated.

"Hello, that's Bolsom!" Hildreth had seen more than I had. "What's he got? He's handling it as if it were dynamite. Can you make it out, Ingram?"

The fading light baffled me, and I could not. As we approached we could hear the sergeant panting.

"Ah, Mr. Hildreth," he called out. "The very man I want to see! Now, what d'you make of this?"

Gingerly, he held out the object he had in hand. It was a webbing of fine silken cordage in which a drum-like mechanism was entangled. This was an aluminum contrivance something like the works of a clock and, also like a clock — it ticked.

"Steady with it, Bolsom — *steady!*"

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Hildreth gently took charge of the apparatus and freed it from its stringings. "It's as much like an infernal machine as anything I've seen — a time-bomb."

"That's what I was thinking, Mr. Hildreth."

"Where'd you get it?"

Bolsom pointed to the tallest tree in the coppice. It was at least thirty feet in height, and its top was a withered massing of leaves and branches and shrivelled twigs. It was sinister against the greenish evening light.

"Chanced to see a blot of something halfway up that tree, so I thought I'd climb up and have a nearer view. That was the blot. I found it hanging on some dead wood."

I marvelled over the cool bravery of the fellow. The instant he touched the tangle he must have been impressed with its likeness to a bomb.

Bolsom stood his ground while Hildreth examined the thing. I walked at least ten yards away from it. Hildreth chuckled.

"Oh, you can come back, Ingram! Your precious newspaper isn't going to lose its gallant editor yet awhile! This is only a clock. No explosives about it that I can find. Come on — it's snowing!"

Like a fool, I half opened my mouth and gazed up at the still summer twilight of the sky. Hildreth roared with merriment.

"No, you ass! I meant that there's snow in this weird tick-tock. Here — *look!*"

Sure enough, he shook several flakes of an icy substance from the opened mechanism to my hand. They melted on my flesh exactly as snow might melt.

But my association with the wizard-like Barnabas Hildreth has not gone for nought. Even as the "flakes" disappeared, my intelligence automatically recorded that they did not leave pustules of water behind — that this was not snow. I also remarked that a stinging sensation was in my flesh wherever one had touched on it — and that a smell had come into the air which was something akin to the aroma of tincture of iodine.

"Think you're at the seaside — *eh?*"

Barnabas said no more than that, but I looked at him with a gasp. He was vibrant, and his skin was pale; he had discovered something of major importance.

Hildreth now ignored us. He concentrated on the clockwork which he had revealed by unlatching the face of the aluminum drum and turning it back on tiny hinges. The ticking still continued, and a smaller dial, set in position as a timing-guide is inlet on an alarm clock's dial, recorded that it was twenty-five minutes past nine. Comparison with Hildreth's watch proved this to be right within a minute or so.

On the inside of the opened aluminum circlet another set of figures could be seen. These were marked by one pointer — a red arrow that

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pricked, precisely, the numeral XII. A tiny coil of green silk-insulated wire ran back from this pointer to connect with a pocket-lamp battery which was secured by brass clips behind the clockwork.

Four thin rods of copper jutted from the opened "face" and their ends were coated with a material which was, apparently, melted glass. Hildreth took a long time over his examination of this stuff, and for the first time that night he seemed entirely satisfied.

The webbing was, as I have said, of silk. It had surprising strength, considering its delicacy. Hildreth tried his level best to snap one of the thin strands, but did not succeed. Then he turned his attention to two or three pieces of fabric which adhered to these cords. Lastly, he bothered himself mightily with a tiny brass eyelet-hole through which one of them ran.

He carefully wrapped the closed drum in the nets of cord and took off his hat, placing the tangle inside its crown. He passed his cigarette case round and we smoked. Then he hummed a little tune and so far came out of his usually sober mien as to clap Detective-Sergeant Bolsom on the shoulders.

"Well," he promised the C.I.D. man, "if all goes as I expect it to go now, your climbing up that tree, Bolsom, earned you a step up in rank. You did a fine bit of work, y'know. If you hadn't spotted it, I really think we'd have had to call Bert Emery's death an unsolved mystery."

"Aren't you going to try to find anything further?" I was curious to know.

Said Barnabas: "There might be a thousand clues still to be found hereabouts, but I'm calling it a day." He shook the hat and the steady ticking sounded louder. "I'm inclined to think I've all I'll need in here."

He made some qualifications of that statement after we left Bolsom to play his now futile night-watchman's part.

"Come on, let's get our traps packed," he almost purred, "and shift our quarters to York. We'll have a fat drink first, then I'll get the car out. There's a naturalist's shop somewhere near York Minster, if my memory serves me aright, and I'm going to knock the gentleman up. I'm afraid I'll have to do the same with some inoffensive chemist."

"What on earth for — at this time of night?"

"I want a heron, alive or dead. A taxidermist's specimen will suit me just as well as a live bird. I also require a hypodermic syringe and a bob's-worth of the strongest peroxide of hydrogen."

I made certain uncouth noises at the back of my throat, whereat he laughed. Then I availed myself of that "fat drink"; I needed it.

Spinning along the road to York in the car, Barnabas decided to talk about another kind of spinning:

"Ever done any angling?"

I told him I had, and that there

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were not many branches of it, from dry-fly artistry to minnow-spinning, that I had neglected. I was not modest being an angler. I mentioned I dressed my own artificial flies, made up my own casts, and generally out-Izaaked Walton.

"The devil you do!" He was quiet for a while, then drawled across to me: "Ever made a quill-minnow, then?"

He was referring to that artificial lure which anglers employ in trout fishing — an imitation small fish contrived from a medium-sized quill. Made transparent, fitted with a leaden head and spinning vanes, blades that cause the tiny doom to twist and dart through the water as a frightened minnow does when pursued by a hungry trout, the interior of the quill is painted to a resemblance of a minnow's coloring and the exterior is fitted with triple hooks — in all, a deadly bait, but not usually to be made by an ordinary fisherman. One buys the finished quill from dealers.

"I haven't gone to that much trouble," I replied. "I buy 'em complete."

"And I score a point on you there; I make them to suit myself." Hildreth was very cocky. "Have done for years. Show you how to do it later on. Of course, the secret lies in 'clearing' the inside of the quill you're using, making it absolutely transparent. I can do that."

"You're more of a fanatic than I am."

"In everything, in every way," he imperturbably agreed.

After we had determined on our hotel in York, Barnabas insisted that I should visit the mortuary where the body of Emery was laid. He left me there to take what time I thought fit, while he carried on his strange quest for a heron and that syringe and the peroxide of hydrogen.

To tell the absolute truth, I could not believe I was gazing on the remains of a man who, forty-eight hours previously, was as warmly blooded and vital as myself. The faint gold of the flesh and the pure hair made for an emotion of bewilderment. After that passed, there was nothing left except passionless curiosity.

It was close to midnight before I retraced my way through the streets of the walled city to our hotel. Inquiring for Hildreth, I found he had preceded me.

I discovered him in a curiously ecstatic state of mind, in a room that reeked like a museum with camphorated and balsamic odors. He had managed to get hold of a stuffed heron and had taken it out of its glass case. He was busy with a cluster of feathers he had plucked from its scandalously denuded tail.

"Now, here you are." He waved a glittering syringe. "Come and have a look at this. This is how you can clean out quills for making your own artificial minnows."

The syringe was filled with peroxide of hydrogen. He had stripped

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the featherings away from the thick end of half a dozen plumes and had thereafter cut lengths of two or three inches off them. Then into the still sealed terminal of the quill on which he experimented — that blunted head which had been embedded in the skin of the bird — he inserted the hollow needle of the syringe. He flooded the quill with peroxide.

Immediately it began to foam and fizz and exude from the lacerated end. Its action was to dissolve and break down all those thin membranes, those delicate diaphragms which Nature provides for the living feather to give it strength without weight and to convey its nourishment. These membranes destroyed, the liquid went on with its "working" to bubble the fragments out of the quill. A rinse with water and — *presto* — a clear and glass-like object was produced, which most certainly would have sufficed as the basis of an artificial minnow.

"All very pretty," I murmured; "but where does it lead? Are you aware it's long after midnight, and goodness knows what people will be thinking about this mummy aroma you've got in the room. We'll be chucked out on our necks!"

"Augustus certainly does hum a bit." he ruefully agreed. "But we must put up with that — after all, set a smell to catch a smell. And that's an observation which is serious, old fellow," He filled the syringe once more and forced out its contents, in the form of an atomized spray, all over the fingers of his left hand. "When we've tried this experiment, I'll finish," he promised.

He concentrated his attention on the action of the peroxide effervescing on his skin. Before long it produced a spore-like encrustation on his flesh; a texture looking like finest *chenille* — most delicate and golden *chenille,* a pallid gold.

I forgot my tiredness then and literally jumped. His eyes glittered wickedly at me.

"Well?"

I now understood his insistence on my viewing Bert Emery's body that night. So recently had I left it, so vivid was its impression on my mind, I could not ignore the significance of this. I gazed, fascinated, on an almost precise duplication of the phenomena of Emery's change. This sherry hue, this velvety brood of infinitesimal scars, this manna-like material which the action of the peroxide had brought into being on Hildreth's fingers — was similar to the state of that shrunken body!

Then I shot a startled glance at the quills, and I remembered the colorless filaments of Emery's hair.

"You — you uncanny devil!" I gasped.

"When you come to consider it," he smiled, "a feather is nothing more nor less than a hair's big brother. What you observed in those quills was only a kind of large-scale illustration of what happened to Emery's hair as he died. All pigmentation and interior structure was driven out

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of it, even as that peroxide drove color and membranes from the quill. I deliberately chose to experiment on a heron — simply because its quills give the truest transparencies. I didn't take you in about making those artificial minnows, Ingram; I've made 'em often, and I merely applied gained knowledge of this problem."

"And it's no longer a problem?"

"B'gad it is! All I know up to now is that Emery *was killed by a smell* a smell that instantly petrified him. I know exactly what smell it was, but how it came to encounter him, like a bolt from the blue, is quite another little story." He chuckled at my bewilderment. "Oh, clear off to bed," he ordered. "Leave me a clear field — I'll be up until morning, as it is, telephoning. So good night, and pleasant dreams!"

Morning brought a fine blazing of summer light — also Barnabas Hildreth clad in a dressing gown and rustling a handful of newspaper clippings.

"Hello, Ingram, show a leg! Here, what d'you make of this little freakiness of fate?"

I blinked and took a gulp at the hot tea he had considerately brought for me. Then I yawned and started to read the clippings:

A SUBMARINE EXPLOSION

Dogger Bank Phenomenon

Returning to Grimsby today, the master and crew of the trawler *Seagerleague* told of a tremendous underwater upheaval they witnessed during the early hours of Thursday off the southwest of the Dogger Bank.

The trawler hands were drawing in the nets when one of them pointed to a curious object which appeared to be falling from the clouds into the sea. This was described as being something like "an umbrella, with a big blue knob for a handle," according to one account.

The skipper of the *Seagerleague,* who observed this phenomenon through his binoculars, was able to give further details. He said that the "knob" was a large sphere which seemed to be filled with a deep blue light. He concurred with the report that the remainder of the falling object was similar to a half-closed umbrella.

Immediately after this had plunged into the sea, a great column of water silently arose, to take the shape of a waterspout. The *Seagerleague* was so pitched about that the trawl was nearly lost.

A miniature tidal wave followed the spout, and after its subsidence, thousands of dead fish were found floating in the locality.

The *Seagerleague's* master is of the opinion that the umbrella-shaped object was a meteor, or a strange form of thunderbolt. He described the smell that was noticed almost immediately following the upheaval as being of the keen and refreshing nature of a wind which ensues after an exceptionally heavy thunderstorm.

"I suppose, Barnabas, you're try-

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ing to trace a connection between this affair and that of the Sherburn-in-Elmet business?"

"Isn't it palpable? You're woolly-witted, old man! But go on — try the next little tit-bit."

I read it over and ran my fingers through my hair. That there was some close adherence to the mystery Hildreth was solving I recognized. But I could not determine where, exactly, it was.

BERLIN, THURSDAY.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

A peculiar story comes from the island of Spiokoroog, one of the Friesian Group off the Hanoverian coast. A workman engaged on the new harbor has discovered a perfect piece of sculpture in the sands. It is a man's hand, and it appears to have been carved in amber.

Plates of Baltic amber are picked up from time to time on the sands of Nordeney and Spiokoroog, but nothing like this marvellous find has ever been known before.

The hand is so exquisitely carved that every line and crevice which marks human flesh is reproduced in the semi-transparent medium of this fossilized gem.

The hand has been sent to Professor Fritz Seindler of the Museum of Fine Arts for examination. His report on the sculpture is awaited with profound interest.

The remainder of the clippings, taken by Hildreth from that day's newspapers, were much in the same strain. I read them all — then, in an access of irritation, flung them far and wide.

"Can't make head or tail of 'em," I snapped.

He said something about a hungry man being an angry man, and suggested I hurry on to breakfast. He picked up the papers and went out. I finished my tea and had a cigarette.

It was eleven o'clock before I encountered him again. Most of the intervening time he had employed in the telephone cabinet.

"Now then, Ingram," he greeted me as though nothing untoward had occurred, "feel like a run out to the Lake District this afternoon? It's a beautiful day; do you the world of good, y'know."

"Business?"

"Well — *yes,* you could call it that. I want to find a fellow called Gregory Wolstenholme, a doctor of physics — the gentleman who jeopardized the lives of the *Seagerleague's* crew, made that mummified article in the mortuary out of Albert Emery — and that sculptured hand which was washed up on the Spiokoroog sands. Care to come?"

I wilted.

Hildreth drove across Yorkshire, almost to the borders of Lancashire before he referred again to the work he had in hand. Then all he said, at first, was:

"The apotheosis of a thug — to wit, one Albert Emery." He grunted wearily. "What a devil of a problem! Yet there's nothing supernal or super-

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natural about Emery's fate that I can see. We can wash that out, here and now. He must have died from some natural cause, even though it be amazingly unusual."

"Won't the *post mortem* give you some idea of——"

"One can't hold a *post mortem* on a block of stone. And that's all that's left of Albert Emery!"

He glared at me.

"Listen, Ingram, you're a Yorkshireman, aren't you?" I told him he knew very well I was. "Then," he replied, "being a 'reight Tyke' you'll be among the last to decry your county and its possessions. What about the Knaresborough Dropping Well —*eh?* Would you deny that articles placed under its waters are changed to actual stone?"

He had me there; I could not. I remembered the Dropping Well and its remarkable properties. Water containing a mysterious charge of liquid stone drips over a mighty boulder into a pool. Anything placed beneath that flux, and saturated, becomes perfectly petrified in course of time.

"I've seen a flitch of bacon," Hildreth rattled on, "'cured' by that Knaresborough water. And let me tell you, Ingram, even to the blunt-ends of the bristles left on the porker's hide, that specimen is the absolute counterpart of any flitch you'd find hung up in a farm kitchen. It's stone, for all that — solid stone!" He shrugged his shoulders. "The body of Bert Emery seems to have undergone a similar petrification, with just one difference; an alarming difference. Instead of addition to its bulk and weight, it has shrunk and grown lighter in the process!"

He tooled the car around a dangerous bend, and I sat silent.

"Then," he turned to another aspect of the mystery, "there are those accounts of the falling blue spheres. Remember how old Leggett said there was a 'blast' at the moment of Emery's death and a keen refreshing smell in the air afterwards. Lay that alongside the captain of the *Seagerleague's* similar tale of the marine convulsion — the silent explosion that killed those fish — and you're on the right track."

"The — *er* — explosion, the 'silent explosion' you mention in Emery's case, was the blast of air the gipsy experienced?"

"Precisely that. The explosion that lifted Emery up, a living man, and dropped him down — a stone mummy."

"And — and *that* also killed the birds and tore the trees and withered everything, I take it?"

"Yes," He gentled the car up a huge hillside and sighed with relief at the sight of a lonely tavern in a mountain pass, in a desolation of Pennine winds and grey wild rocks. "Of course, the fallen balloon caused it."

He said no more until we had finished a simple lunch in the old mountainside hostelry. Then he lit his pipe and let everything go:

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"When Bolsom found those silken cords and that clock, he made success most sure. I recognized the eyelet and the fabric as being the remains of a balloonette — and telephoning headquarters did the rest. One of our agents got on the job at once. There are very few manufacturers of that kind of article in this country: Messrs. Rogerson and Brown, of Acton, were the people we decided on.

"They have recently supplied fourteen of these small balloons to a private individual, Doctor Wolstenholme, the personage we're about to tackle in his lair in Cumberland. And Messrs. Rogerson and Brown, jealous of their unsullied reputation, believing they had unwittingly aided in some criminal enterprise, split their beans good and plenty.

"After manufacture, they told our man, they consigned the balloons to Treowen and Sons, aeronautical instrument manufacturers, in the Minorities. Treowen's account of participation came as freely as that of Rogerson and Brown, and from the same fear. They tell us that Wolstenholme required timing devices fitted to the balloonette — capable of being set like an alarm clock to operate a ripping-cord at any hour selected for that pull by the person sending the balloons aloft.

"Of course, knowing Wolstenholme's genuine reputation as a scientist, both these firms innocently strove to give their best, believing his story that he wanted the contrivances for research work in upper atmospheres.

"He wanted just a little more than that," Hildreth joyously puffed away. "He wanted to use the upper atmosphere to further quite another branch of research work: that which deals with devastation of human life and property. I am informed that most of his scientific life has been spent in devising explosive substances. Wolstenite is one of his inventions, and it's worse than T.N.T. — and only a year or so ago he perfected a species of blasting-gelatine which is as stable as rock itself, yet as fulminative as nitro-glycerine.

"Oh, yes, a nice and humanitarian gentleman is our friend Gregory Wolstenholme!" Hildreth sighed, and got to his feet and made for the door. "Now it appears he has realized a dream which scientists of his calibre have dreamt for a century and more — he's managed to control a natural force to the extent of establishing it as a silent and world-destroying element."

"And that force?" I incautiously asked him.

He rounded on me and grinned: "How many more times have I to tell you—*the smell.*"

At a house called Firlane Lodge, just outside Keswick, we stumbled on tragedy. This was the house of Doctor Wolstenholme — a domicile where turmoil was apparent. Police stood idly in the garden and an ambulance was at the door. And from some room inside a great

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screaming and chattering poured forth.

"Hello—hello!" The words were bitterly clear. "Is that City two-four-seven-nine-two? — Yes ... *yes* ... Oh, I'm Cæsar — Julius Cæsar, I tell you! ... *Hah,* that's frightened the wits out of you, hasn't it? No, I'm not — just pulling your leg: I'm Professor Sir Lord Wolstenholme, and I'm going to blow up the world ... tomorrow ... *tomorrow!*"

A cackle of maniacal glee came after the idiotic words. Hildreth exchanged startled glances with me.

"Come on," he quietly said, "let's get inside and find out what's gone wrong."

Our credentials were presented, and we learned from the doctors and a justice of the peace who were in the drawing-room that Wolstenholme was certifiably insane. Even as we chatted, an injection took its effect, and his voice trailed off into silence. Then they put him tenderly into blankets and strappings and carried him out to the waiting ambulance. The police and a medico went with him. And the company of mankind had ended its dealings with the deadliest potential enemy it had ever known.

Barnabas Hildreth proved that to me when he took me into the madman's laboratory and showed me those big glass globes which stood, in boxes filled with sawdust, on his bench. Globes were they that seemed full of indigo fieriness.

"That's the type of thing the master of the *Seagerleague* saw going down to the waters," Hildreth told me. "He wasn't far out in his tale, was he?"

I agreed that he was not. Then I saw two deflated silken balloons and two aluminum drums which sent out a steady ticking. Four copper rods stuck out from each of these contraptions and a blowpipe and bellows was assembled near them.

"Wolstenholme fused those glass containers to the copper rods," Hildreth explained, "previous to his sending his balloons aloft. You follow the sequence, don't you? Setting his timing mechanism to pull on the ripping cords of the envelope, he could make sure that his balloons would be deprived of their gas at any particular time he decided on. The weight of the globe and the clockwork would then drag the ripped envelope to earth, like a plummet; an aerial bomb. Hitting the ground, the globe would shatter to bits."

I recalled that red pointer which had been set to the numeral XII on the mechanism we found at Sherburn. And the old gipsy also talked of midnight.

"Wolstenholme sent out some of his balloons on the night of the sixth, and a wind carried one to Sherburn and another out over the Dogger Bank. Presumably another sailed across the North Sea to the island of Spiokoroog.

"At midnight, considering the Sherburn affair at present, the mechanism pulled the ripcord and down

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plunged one of these globes. It hit the glade of the coppice and burst. Emery was sleeping there. The explosive force released by the burst caught hold of him, stripped him, and mummified him."

"But — the force, man! What *was* it?"

"Compressed ozone," Hildreth calmly said. "Didn't I tell you all along it was *'the smell'*? And what does the word *ozone* mean but that?"

I was dumfounded. How the dickens ozone could matter . . . then I remembered the story of the *Seagerleague's* skipper, and the gipsy's tale; the accounts of the keen and refreshing scent of the air. I also recalled Hildreth's cryptic observation about "the seaside" when I had thought of tincture of iodine.

"I deduced ozone when I saw those flakes of snow-like stuff in that aluminum casing," he went on. "Those were oxydizings caused by its contact with the metal. When they were shaken out of the airtight security of the drum and warmed by your hand in open air — they simply dissolved to gas again. Ozone, after all, is merely a condensed form of oxygen; compressed, intensified, *forced,* if you like it better; oxygen . . . forced so that three atoms of oxygen become two of ozone.

"That's the whole secret. Ozone cannot remain as such. It simply *must* resolve again into the atomic ordinance of its parent gas. And it does that with such fury that it is an elemental explosive. In a minor way, by analogy, you saw the energy expended by the fizzing 'ozonized water' — peroxide of hydrogen — I used.

"Five percent of ozone in the air would end the world. All things would be disintegrated by it. It would make all flesh into dust; all vegetable life into dried string. One ten-thousandth *per centum* of it in air can sting the nostrils and cause exhilaration. I tell you, ozone is a queer thing!

"When it is compressed in a laboratory at temperatures hundreds of degrees below freezing point, it becomes a dark and indigo liquid . . . and that you have in these glass globes. Crack one of 'em — and in a flash you would cease to be. Not only that, your flesh would be 'rubberized' by it, and, after an hour or two, it would go as hard as stone.

"That's what happened to Emery. You see, the terrific blast of the ozone in its strife to become oxygen once more — an absolutely instantaneous process — is utterly inimical to flesh and blood and vegetable life.

"Now Wolstenholme evidently mastered the secret of compressing ozone enormously. Then releasing it, liquefied, in glass globes, to fall to earth at appointed times, he waited to see what would happen. He was heading, don't you see, to the production of a mighty explosive that would outdo anything ever dreamed of before. As he wailed there, in his madness, he could destroy London

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with a few of these."

Gently he smoothed the surface of one of the globes.

"The hand that Professor Seindler has in charge, so I have learned by Continental 'phone, is a mummified human hand, not a sculpture. One of those damned things must have made a direct hit somewhere near those islands.

"I suspected ozone even before I saw that cordage and the clockwork. You see, Ingram, it deterges all color from hair, but it also curls it. And Bert Emery, the newly-cropped, looked more like a fair Assyrian, from a hirsute point of view, than anything I ever met."

He left the laboratory then, to give some careful instructions about the disposal of the dangerous blue spheres. The police and he conferred for over half an hour before he got them to act, in every way, as he required. Then he came out again to me, and by the calmness of his demeanor I saw that another case was satisfactorily concluded.

"Come, old man," he gently said, putting his arm across my shoulders, "we'll get back now and find Cora Leggett. It'll probably ease her poor mind . . . to know." He closed his eyes and shook his head. "They loved, and one is dead; *requiescat in pace,* Albert Emery, vagabond."

I found that I, too, had raised my hat.

EDITOR'S NOTE

"The Smell That Killed" was first published in "Pearson's," issue of February 1935—ten years before the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima . . .

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SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

IT'S AN ill wind, etc. One of the few beneficial by-products of the current cost cycle is the growing tendency of publishers to price mystery novels at $2.50 instead of the customary $2. I say this not because I hold with higher prices for books *per se* (I definitely don't); but because for many years the business of publishing mysteries has existed in an economic vacuum, to the very considerable detriment of authors.

I refer of course to the rental library system, on which mystery stories depend for their sales to an extent approached by no other type of literature. According to reliable estimates, from 75 to 90 percent of all new mysteries published are sold to rental libraries. For each copy thus sold, the publisher receives only one purchase price and the author only one royalty (the latter often less than a single rental fee) even though the same copy may be rented to as many as 50 or 60 readers.

It is not my purpose, however, to waste breath denouncing rental libraries. Good or bad, they have become a national institution which shows no present signs of weakening. Moreover, there is no doubt that they do make books available to many readers who couldn't otherwise afford them.

What is (or should be) of concern to mystery readers is the effect of the rental system on mystery writers. One doesn't need to be a mathematical genius to realize what happens when an author wins 1,000 new readers — and by so doing increases his sales by only 20 or 30 copies and his royalties by $4 or $5. (This is what I mean by an economic vacuum.) Have you ever wondered why so many promising new writers produce a mystery novel or two and then disappear from the lists? The answer should be obvious.

Some of the best heads in the literary trade have been scratched over this puzzle, to little avail up to the present time. Various elaborate schemes, such as a royalty on rentals, or a tax, or revenue stamp, have been advanced, only to be discarded as too complex and expensive to operate. For some time now it has been clear to authors and publishers who have pondered the problem that the only immediate hope of improvement, and that regrettably slight, lay in an increase in the retail price. (To illustrate: a $2.50 price simply means that the author will receive one-fourth more in total royalties at any given sales figure than he would at a $2 price.)

Despite the obvious advantages of the higher price to authors and publishers alike, custom and precedent

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are very hard to combat in the book business. Until the present year, only one major publishing house to my certain knowledge has had the courage to price its mysteries openly at the higher level, and I pause here for a bow to Messrs. Duell, Sloan & Pearce for their pioneering in a worthy cause. This season, however, persuaded by rising production costs, a significant number of other leading houses have taken the long overdue plunge. To these I say more power, and to others still hesitant: "Come on in, the water's fine."

Mystery Writers of America, Inc. is a professional organization whose motto is: "Crime Does Not Pay — Enough." To this group, pledged to the economic betterment of mystery and crime writers, I suggest that no more constructive campaign could be undertaken at this time than the encouragement of a uniform $2.50 price for mysteries by all publishers.

And, if such action should result in an increase in rental library rates, I have no doubt that mystery readers will accept the increase with good sportsmanship, perhaps even an apologetic blush for the many years they have been getting away — however unintentionally — with murder.

Notes on My Cuff: Barrows Mussey of Brattleboro, Vt., would have you know that "the universal and proper detestation of HAD-I-BUT-KNOWN stories goes back exactly 400 years," and proves his point by this quotation from John Heywood's PROVERBES (1546): "Beware of, Had I wist." Moved and seconded for inclusion in Mystery Writers of America by-laws. . . . Died: Harriette Ashbrook, 47, who also wrote as Susannah Shane; Dana Chambers, 51, whose legal name was Albert F. Leffingwell. . . . Publisher's Division: Harper is the latest publishing house to add a full-fledged mystery department. Joan Kahn will be editor. . . . Margaret Petherbridge (Mrs. John Farrar) choosing whodunits for Farrar & Straus. . . . And Anthony Boucher, now scouting mystery talent for Random House, invites correspondence at 2805 Ellsworth Street, Berkeley, Calif. . . . Hollywood Intelligence (don't get me wrong): Raymond Chandler is busy adapting Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's THE INNOCENT MRS. DUFF for Paramount, while Fox completes his THE HIGH WINDOW and MGM ditto THE LADY IN THE LAKE (which I hear will introduce something sensational in 'tec screen technique). . . . Burgess Meredith may play John Roeburt's Jigger Moran before the cameras. . . . Charlotte Armstrong, on the Coast for filming of THE UNSUSPECTED, at work on new suspense novel, THE BETTER TO EAT YOU. . . . Errol Flynn to star in Marjorie Carleton's CRY WOLF (type casting?). . . . Authors Here & There: David (DEATH AND TAXES) Dodge, out of the Navy, is spending a year in Nicaragua. . . . Wade (DEADLY WEAPON) Miller "is" a couple of ex-Sergeants, Bob Wade and Bill Miller, both 26, radio writers, resi-

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dents of San Diego. . . . What ever became of Jonathan Latimer? . . . Martini, Mr. and Mrs. Norths' cat in DEATH OF A TALL MAN, is a real Siamese kitten, owned by the Lockridges, and called Martini. . . . And Lee Wilson, whose fine THIS DEADLY DARK is told from a blinded newspaperman's point of view, lived blindfolded for days at a time to give her novel realism.

Current Crimes: The heaviest Fall season since before the war finds the new mysteries arriving at such a rate that a beleaguered reviewer scarcely knows where to begin. . . . Rex Stout's long-awaited THE SILENT SPEAKER (Viking), the first full-length Nero Wolfe novel in six years, opens promisingly with the fatal bashing of Cheney Boone, director of the Bureau of Price Regulation, just before his scheduled address to the National Industrial Association. If the story which follows lacks some of the fluidity and exuberance of past performances, perhaps it's because Nero and Archie haven't quite recuperated from their war efforts . . . . In David Dodge's IT AIN'T HAY (S. & S.), Whit Whitney, the rugged insurance investigator you'll remember from DEATH AND TAXES, collides head-on with the vicious marijuana racket and nearly loses his life and wife. The ensuing tale, a skilful blend of hard-slugging social document and absorbing action story, is one of the years' top performances in its division and emphatically not to be missed. . . . I am not sure what Michael Innes is trying to do with — or to — the detective story. In contrast to his recent fantasies (and pretty obviously a tongue-in-cheek reply to the objections they have occasioned in some quarters), WHAT HAPPENED AT HAZLEWOOD (Dodd) observes the plot structure and devices of the traditional British whodunit to the point of clichédom — but without the humor which was the redeeming feature of the fantasies. In short, Mr. Innes succeeds in being merely involved and tedious. Why doesn't he heed his well-wishers and return to the mood (and industry) of those superb early performances, HAMLET, REVENGE! and LAMENT FOR A MAKER? . . . A much more satisfying (because sincere and unpretentious) example of the chess-puzzle *genus Britannicum* is John Rhode's DEATH IN HARLEY STREET (Dodd), wherein ursine Dr. Priestly is confronted with a unique demise which on its face cannot be murder, suicide, or even accident. Brilliance of puzzle makes up for snail-pacing.

In RIDE THE PINK HORSE (Duell), Dorothy Hughes has written a brooding tragedy of crime and punishment strikingly contrasted against the lights and shadows of a New Mexican fiesta. Despite occasional slips into sentimentality and over-writing, this novel should appeal to admirers of the BRIGHTON ROCK school of thriller. . . . I would be hard put to name a more all-round enjoyable story among the Fall contestants

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than Edwin Lanham's SLUG IT SLAY (Harcourt). A smoothly fashioned first mystery by a well known "legitimate" novelist, it mixes authentic newspaper background with lively action, people you know and like, and competent puzzling. . . . Slightly reminiscent of THE INNOCENT VOYAGE, Michael Blankfort's THE WIDOW-MAKERS (S. & S.) is a modern crime-fairy tale about three children and their bewildered struggle to keep their dead father's secret from the international bad men. I predict it will be the year's most controversial entry; readers will either like it very much or not at all. . . . Also likely to stir debate is David Goodis' effective if hyper-thyroid suspense novel DARK PASSAGE (Messner), but chiefly on the grounds of an unsympathetic central character and some rather confused ethical values . . . I am afraid that the experimental form of WHO RIDES A TIGER (Crime Club) by Doris Miles Disney — a fifty-year-old murder not revealed until the last chapter — will repel most conventional whodunit fanciers. They will be the losers, for Miss Disney is fast becoming one of our most accomplished crime stylists. . . . Falling halfway between suspense novel and orthodox whodunit, Julius Fast's THE BRIGHT FACE OF DANGER (Rinehart) marks a technical advance over last year's prize-winning WATCHFUL AT NIGHT, but somehow lacks the fresh perspective which gave the earlier novel impact. . . . I am aware that Leslie Charteris has his followers, and I willingly concede him a certain comic-strip facility with plots. But after reading what passes for prose in THE SAINT SEES IT THROUGH (Crime Club), I'll take Superman! . . . . Recommended: STRANGER THAN TRUTH by Vera Caspary (Random); DEATH OF A TALL MAN by Frances and Richard Lockridge (Lippincott); THE FOURTH STAR by Richard Burke (Mystery House); THE WRONG WAY DOWN by Elizabeth Daly (Rinehart); CAT AND MOUSE by Eaton Goldthwaite (Duell). . . . Promising: THE SHADE OF TIME by David Duncan (Random); THE GLASS ROOM by Edwin Rolfe & Lester Fuller (Rinehart). . . . Major disappointments: THE LIFE SENTENCE by H. C. Bailey (Crime Club); THE SHADOWY THIRD by Marco Page (Dodd).

Which leaves me just space enough to call your attention to these anthologies and collections for your permanent library: MURDER WITH A DIFFERENCE edited by Christopher Morley (Random); THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1946 edited by Ellery Queen (Little); THE HARDBOILED OMNIBUS: EARLY STORIES FROM "BLACK MASK" edited by Joseph T. Shaw (S. & S.); FAMOUS PLAYS OF CRIME AND DETECTION; FROM SHERLOCK HOLMES TO ANGEL STREET edited by Van H. Cartmell and Bennett Cerf (Blakiston); THE COMPLETE MURDER SAMPLER edited by James Nelson (Crime Club); SAM JOHNSON: DETECTOR by Lillian de la Torre (Knopf); NOTHING BUT MURDER by William Roughead (Sheridan.)

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Short-short stories come and go, or to put it another way, there are short-shorts and there are short-shorts. Only a few linger in the memory long after they have been read — those are the "honeys," the "beauts," the real contributions to one of the most difficult of literary forms. Nearly twenty years ago (and that's a long, long time to remember any story), we read Corey Ford's "One on the House." We thought it exceptional in 1929, and on re-reading we still think it exceptional. We hope you will agree . . .

ONE ON THE HOUSE

by COREY FORD

"GIVE us a drink of orangeade." The man behind the counter slammed the drawer of the cash register shut and whirled in surprise: "Huh?"

"One orangeade," repeated the newcomer calmly, sliding a dime across the damp counter.

"Oh. Sure." His hand slowly left his hip-pocket, and the color flooded back into his face. He flung open the metal cover, and emptied a scoopful of orange liquid into a tall tumbler. "Wait'll I put in a seed to show it's real."

"Thanks. Your clock right, there?"

"Yep. Just five A. M."

"Broadway an' Forty-fourth is a pretty empty corner this time of the morning," mused the stranger, sipping his drink slowly. "Just before dawn."

"Yep, when they turn all the street-lamps out." His eyes still searched the face of the newcomer across the counter. "By the way . . . have I see you aroun' here before?"

"I dunno, have you?"

"I mean, I wondered if you came by here very often."

"Not very." He prodded the dime with his forefinger. "Here y'are."

"No. Keep it. That drink was on the house."

"Aren't you afraid someone will spot you? For all you know *I* might be a spotter."

"Huh! No spotter would be wandering aroun' *this* time o' night. It's early in the evening, and later when the theater crowd is out that they keep an eye on you. This time o' night nobody ever comes aroun', I know."

"Tough hours, haven't you?" twisting the tumbler between his fingers.

"I'll say. From eight P. M. to eight A. M. Boy! and does that sun look good in the morning! And does the evening build up on you! Work like a fool all during the theater rush, and then again at intermissions, and when the shows are out. Then about twelve o'clock the crowd starts thinning out, and after that all you get is once in a while a drunk or a chorus man or a grifter of some sort. Then when you're all tired out, you got to spend the rest of the night with nothing to do, and believe me! each hour seems

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about four hours long. Lonely? —"

"I should think there'd be a good chance of someone sticking you up."

"Huh?" darting a quick look at the other's face.

"I say, you ever been in a holdup?"

"Only once," shaking his head. "But that was enough. Some guy comes in and starts talking, same as you're talking to me now. He buys a drink and we chins along. I wasn't noticing him particularly. He slides me a dime across the counter, and I turn to open the drawer of the cash register, well — all of a sudden he yanks out a rod and tells me to throw 'em up."

"Yeah? What did you do?"

"What did *I* do? Say! It wasn't *my* money! I just stuck both mitts as high in the air as I could reach, and told him to take the store away if he wanted to. So he grabbed the roll out of the open drawer, stuck a gag in my mouth, tied me up and left me under the counter. Neatest thing you ever —"

"You wouldn't know this guy again if you saw him?"

"I don't know. He was about my height, I guess, an' he had dark hair something like me. O' course I was pretty scared to notice —"

"That's him, all right. That was Joe Mallon." The newcomer grinned and held out his hand. "That's the bird I'm after. I'm a plainclothes man, buddy. There's been so many stickups along this chain lately that the company's hired me to make the rounds."

"Why, gee. . . ." The face of the man behind the counter broke into a delighted smile. "That certainly was one on me, all right. I thought you was — was a burglar!"

The visitor set down the empty glass and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "Well, I gotta be shoving along. Thanks for the drink."

"That's all right. That was on the house."

He continued to nod pleasantly as the plainclothes man ambled up the sidewalk and disappeared around the next corner. The smile vanished. He stooped swiftly, tightened the gag in the mouth of a roped and bound figure that lay helpless under the counter, then rose again and glanced cautiously up and down the street.

"Yep." He vaulted the counter silently. "One on the house," he murmured.

"Q"

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For EQMM's Second Annual Detective Short-Story Contest which closed October 20, 1946, Roy Vickers submitted a new Department of Dead Ends tale. Provocatively titled "The House-in-Your-Hand Murder," it is one of the finest examples of Mr. Vickers's special bent in the field of realistic crime writing that it has ever been your Editor's privilege to read. Pending its publication in EQMM next year — as a prizewinner or not, as the judges in their wisdom shall have determined — we bring you another fascinating investigation of the Department of Dead Ends. "The Fantastic Clue" relates how Hugh Wakering broke most of the rules in that classic gambit of homicide now known as the Trunk Murder, and how after playing the opening moves with confidence and finesse, Hugh Wakering found himself troublesomely saddled with a fantastic clue — a clue six feet long and weighing exactly one hundred and forty-five pounds.

THE FANTASTIC CLUE

by ROY VICKERS

ONE OF THE MOST dangerous and troublesome methods of disposing of a murdered body is to pack it in one or more travelling trunks for deposit at a railway station: this method is commonly used in poverty areas where the corpse cannot be conveyed unobserved to an automobile.

Hugh Wakering, however, himself a well-to-do lawyer, broke most of the rules of the Trunk Murder. For one thing, the trunk was a packing case designed to carry machinery; for another, the corpse, adequately concealed in a large Wellman car, was driven for about eighty miles under cover of darkness over long stretches of open country; for a third, the murderer, having successfully deposited the corpse, found himself compelled to carry away from the railway station a fantastic "clue", six feet long and weighing exactly one hundred and forty-five pounds — namely the driving shaft of the Arbee Steam Roller.

The shaft was consigned to Messrs. Tibbits of Dinton, a market town some eighty miles west of London, on a loop line from the tiny junction of Sudchester. On February 1st, 1936, the railway locomotive drivers and firemen went on strike. On the morning of February 2nd, Messrs. Tibbets sent a lorry the dozen odd miles to Sudchester to pick up the driving shaft, which would otherwise stay there until the strike ended.

The packing case arrived in their yard at nine o'clock and was at once opened. As is known, it was found to

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contain, not the shaft of the Arbee Steam Roller, but the naked body of a man in early middle-age, subsequently identified as Cuthbert Bridstowe, a prosperous coffee broker.

Medical evidence established that death, inflicted by a bullet fired at close range from behind and shattering the spinal column, had occurred within twenty-four hours.

Obviously, it was not a local murder, so Scotland Yard was at once informed. By midday, Superintendent Karslake's men on the spot were reporting that the packing case had arrived at the loop line junction of Sudchester at eight on the evening of January 31st. The medical evidence therefore established Sudchester as the site of the substitution.

In the packing case, wooden rests supporting the shaft, which could have been slipped from their slots, had been clumsily smashed, suggesting a "packer" with no mechanical training and no general handiness.

There had been no official at Sudchester station between eight at night and five the following morning. As the station stood by itself in almost open country, it would have been easy to break into the goods shed, though the latter bore no signs of a forced entry.

The driving shaft of the Arbee Steam Roller was not at Sudchester.

Further investigation drew from the porter who had opened the goods shed in the morning that the only unusual thing he had noticed was a bunch of red carnations in the yard, close to the doors of the goods shed. As the flowers had faded he had thrown them on the refuse dump, where they were found by Karslake's man. The carnations were wrapped in part of a poster, the size of a newspaper page, carrying propaganda for an Animal society.

"We want that driving shaft," said Karslake. "Send it out on the teleprinter. Pass me the makers' description and get me the B.B.C."

The teleprinter yielded quick results. From Whitchurch, forty miles Londonwards of Sudchester, came a report that a constable on cycle patrol had seen a Wellman car stop on the bridge at one forty a.m. A man got out, stretched himself and leaned over the parapet. Suspecting that he might be about to throw himself into the Thames, the constable approached and asked him to explain himself.

As was later obvious, the man was Wakering, the murderer. But he gave the constable the name of the victim, Cuthbert Bridstowe, producing Bridstowe's driving license, containing Bridstowe's address, duly reported. The constable's report added that the bucket seat had been removed to make room for a piece of machinery answering to the description of the driving shaft, though the driver had said it was part of an hydraulic lift. As there was no reason to suppose such a piece of machinery to have been stolen, the constable had made no further inquiries. On the back of the car was pasted a

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poster, about the size of a newspaper sheet, propagandizing for an Animal Society.

Independently, came a report from Sudchester that blood-stained clothing and a revolver — subsequently identified as the property of the deceased — had been found in a gravel pit some three miles west of Sudchester. Karslake's men had been led there by a yokel who had been given a lift by this unusual murderer and had actually sat on the Arbee driving shaft.

With the six o'clock news, the B.B.C. broadcast the Whitchurch constable's description of the man, the number of the car, and details and number of the driving shaft.

Then information poured in. When tabulated, it revealed that, after leaving Sudchester Junction, the driver had knocked up the garage in Sudchester village, shortly after eleven, had taken six gallons of petrol and had then driven on to the gravel pit, where he had dumped the clothing and the revolver, and would, no doubt, have added the driving shaft if he had not been interrupted.

The car had then turned back and travelled straight-road through Whitchurch to London. At two-fifteen, at an all-night garage near Kew Bridge — on the western fringe of the built-up area which is London — the pumpman had supplied five gallons. He noticed that the bucket seat had been moved to make room for a piece of machinery and that there was a poster on the back of the car.

Finally, the Shell Mex garage in the Strand, Central London, reported that the Wellman of that number had garaged shortly after three a.m. But the bucket seat was in its proper position, and there was no driving shaft in the car.

"Then he brought that spare part into London!" pronounced Karslake. "And he couldn't have allowed himself as much as ten minutes off the route for dumping it. Where could you dump a thing like that in London? Hm! Only in the parks. Ring 'em all up and ask for an immediate search. Tell 'em if it's there it's bound to be near the roadways." Karslake added: "If our man has still got that spare part, he'll have to keep it until we call for it."

"Is anything to be done about those carnations, sir?" asked his junior.

"Might as well check up, as a matter of form," answered Karslake. "The poster is issued by that mad Hemmelman woman. Ask her if she can oblige with a list of those who have received copies. It might yield something — about the deceased, of course. A murderer doesn't carry flowers around."

Karslake cannot be blamed for failing to guess that the clue-value of the carnations lay, not in their wrapper but in the flowers themselves — in the fact that they were in the car at the time of the murder. As an abstract clue, the carnations were, so to speak, crushed under the weight of the Arbee driving shaft. For

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Hugh Wakering *had* been "carrying them around," and actually had them in his hand when he shot Cuthbert Bridstowe. Indeed, the scent of them had been a vital factor in the act of pressing the trigger.

True, the wrapper quickly brought Scotland Yard face to face with the murderer and put him in some danger. If he had been questioned about the carnations instead of about the wrapper, Wakering would have lost his nerve. This he admitted when he was dying — in his own bed, in his own house, ten years after the murder.

The second broadcast described Wakering as being about five feet nine, in the middle thirties, dark hair, dark eyes, a little prominent, regular features and well cut clothes, refined speech, probably a member of the professional classes.

He was, in fact, a solicitor. He had a small but comfortable practice, with offices off Mincing Lane, where the tea and coffee brokers predominate. The police description was valueless, for it could have been applied to thousands. It failed to explain that he had a particular kind of handsomeness, comparable to that of a film star, so that strangers who had once noticed him tended to recognize him. Yet, oddly, his appearance seemed to be wholly lacking in appeal to women. At thirty-six he was still living with his mother.

The trail of the murder begins on January 28th at nine in the morning, outside the gates of Holloway Prison. Wakering's clientele included not a single crook, but it included that astonishing public figure, Mrs. Hemmelman, a wealthy widow, the generous champion of almost any lost cause that had a crankish twist to it. Mrs. Hemmelman had chosen to serve a month's imprisonment rather than pay a fine of forty shillings for failling to keep one of her dogs under proper restraint. And she had asked Wakering to meet her on discharge.

When Wakering arrived at the prison he saw Mrs. Hemmelman's Rolls Royce parked at the curb, its stately rear disfigured by a poster, the size of a newspaper page. For the dog incident had been elevated to a burning social question, demanding immediate legislation. A quire of the wretched posters had been sent to his office for distribution.

After passing the time of day with the chauffeur, Wakering decided to wait by the Rolls. He waited quite a long time, unaware that Mrs. Hemmelman, now a free woman, was upbraiding the Lady Governor on defects of the prison system.

While Wakering was thus stamping to keep his feet warm, other female prisoners were emerging to freedom. And presently came Jeannie.

He stared very hard but was still uncertain, for it was twelve years and two months, he remembered, since he had last seen her. She was already walking away in the direction of the City. He ran after her.

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"*Jeannie!*" Again he was short of absolute certainty. Apart from the changes in her face, her dress was all wrong. "Jeannie Bridstowe!"

"Why, it's old Hugh!"

Her voice, we must imagine, played on his nervous system and made him forget her altered appearance and her unsuitable dress — the voice that had thrilled him a dozen years ago. The shock was therefore the greater when the tone roughened as she added: "I saw you as I came out of stir and I said it can't be him."

Stir! He clutched her arm.

"Jeannie! What were you doing in that prison?"

She wrenched her arm free.

"Six months, if you want to know. Anything else before we say goodbye? Goodbye!"

"Don't dare to talk to me in that disgusting jargon!" It was a cross between a command and a prayer, for the dream of a dozen years was being grossly profaned. "Does Cuthbert know you have been in prison?"

"Cuthbert? Oo, I see what you're getting at — you called me 'Jeannie Bridstowe'. So I was, for a month or two. But we never got married."

"Never got married! But I sent you both a telegram and a present!"

"Yes, I remember now. That was nice of you, Hugh!" Again the voice and manner of a dozen years ago, this time driving out the last flickering consciousness of his duty to Mrs. Hemmelman. Jeannie went on: "But we couldn't explain at the time. And there's no sense in raking it all up now. So let's say goodbye as friends. I can't answer a lot of questions about everything — I can't really."

"I won't ask you a single one. But I've got to tell you something."

"All right then. I know where we can sit for a bit. But we'll have to take a 'bus, because they don't like taxis."

They had to walk to the 'bus stop. On the way they passed a florist's.

"Red carnations!" exclaimed Jeannie. "They used to be my lucky flower. D'you remember?"

Yes, he remembered. He urged her into the shop and bought her a bunch of red carnations at five shillings each. Their scent brought him unbearable memories of frustrated desire for her, as she used to be. He could hardly bear to look at her now.

She took him to a cellar bar in the neighborhood of Kings Cross Station, where drinks were served round the clock — a resort of small crooks too stupid to realize that the police let it function solely because it acted as a sort of mousetrap. Half a dozen couples were distributed about the bar. A fat, white-faced man, unnoticed by Wakering, gave Jeannie a furtive glance of welcome. The potman greeted her as "Jeannie."

She piloted Wakering to a quiet corner.

"Mine's a double Scotch," she said.

At that time of day! But for Wakering the actuality of Jeannie was snowed under in a desperate determination to salvage his dream.

"This is what I have to tell you,

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Jeannie. Please don't say anything until I have finished."

He began with a rather rose-colored picture of the days when Jeannie Ruthen was a typist employed by the administration of London University, and two friends, Hugh Wakering and Cuthbert Bridstowe, were law students, and Hugh was in love with Jeannie, whose attitude was correctly noncommittal. Then, rather larger than real life, came the introduction of Jeannie to Cuthbert Bridstowe shortly after they had graduated.

Bridstowe obtained a post in Manchester. Jeannie joined him there, to stay for a week, as Hugh Wakering was given to understand, with an aunt of Bridstowe's at the end of which they would be married.

"I meant everything I said in that telegram, Jeannie. Although I was heart-broken, I was also happy, because I honestly believed that Cuthbert was the better man. And I loved you so much that I was happy for your sake.

"I heard when Cuthbert gave up the law and stepped into his uncle's business. For one thing the firm's office is almost opposite mine — so near that, for nearly every working day of the last ten years, I have watched Cuthbert arrive in the morning — watched him get into his car after the garage man has driven it round at five in the afternoon.

"But I never approached him. I bore him no ill-will whatever. But I knew I could not endure his physical presence — that it would remind me too much that he held you in his arms. I felt it — more honorable — to keep out of the way.

"I know all about Cuthbert. He happens to have become an animal fan; a wealthy client of mine, a well-known woman, often talks about him, though she doesn't know I knew him once. When I heard he had a son I thought it was your son. That was six years ago. I have been imagining you as a happy wife and mother — in a queer sort of way sharing the happiness I believed to be yours and his. For all these years. So you see, Jeannie, you can't just meet me in the street and say goodbye."

"Well, fancy!" exclaimed Jeannie. "I hadn't any idea you felt like that about me, Hugh."

She gave him a reasonably truthful account of herself. It was a standard story of seduction under promise of marriage — redeemed from the commonplace only by the fact that she had no particular grievance against Bridstowe — was inclined to blame her own shortcomings. In time, she had drifted into the underworld, with occasional excursions into petty larceny resulting in a number of short prison sentences.

Hugh Wakering barely listened, for he had by now read the essentials of her history from her appearance and habits and her speech. He observed that she had consumed his whiskey as well as her own. She was socially, morally and physically degraded — by the man he had thought

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better than himself!

To the introvert, self-dramatization is the breath of life. Hugh Wakering saw that the dream need not be salvaged — the dream in which he had figured as a saintly numbskull. This time he would play an heroic role. After his death someone would write of him as one of the great lovers of history — a man who implemented the loftiest principles in his everyday life.

"Jeannie, my dear, Cuthbert Bridstowe's love — if we can so call it — did nothing but hurt you. It brought you years of sordid wretchedness."

"Oo! Steady on! I wouldn't blame it all on poor old Cuthbert."

"I do." He resented the interruption. "I was going to say that my love is unchanged by what you have been telling me. It is exactly as it was a dozen years ago. D'you know what I am going to do? I am going to take you home to my mother. I live with her. And in four days we will be married. And I shall devote my life to the task of making up to you for what you have suffered."

Viewed from the angle of the poor little drab, it was a colossal bribe. But Jeannie had never cheated a man who had been kind to her.

"I couldn't, Hugh. Your mother wouldn't stand for it. And, if you must know, I've got something *here*." She indicated her lungs. "The doctor in stir told me. And besides, what's the use of pretending? I couldn't stick your kind of life, however hard I tried."

"You think you couldn't, but I know you're wrong." A brave, patient smile spread over the handsome face. "I will never take 'No' for an answer, Jeannie. But I will not force you to anything. You needn't come home with me now if you don't want to. But you must let me give you sufficient money —"

"Not here!" whispered Jeannie. "Those others'll see."

Before they parted she accepted a few pounds for old times' sake and gave him an address. Hugh Wakering was content. Not by bullying her, as others had done, but by gentleness and charm he would gain her unlimited confidence and then her abject devotion. He would build where others had destroyed. He had not exaggerated when he said that the new dream permeated "every fibre of his being." When he is thus possessed by a fixed idea, an introvert becomes a fanatic.

The next day he called at her lodgings with the intention of taking her out to lunch at some obscure restaurant where he could begin on her table manners. The landlady, of the kind he had more or less expected, told him:

"It's all her own fault. You know what a frightful night it was last night, with sleet and that East wind. She would go out, though she wasn't short o' cash. I told her it would bring back her coughin' and so it did. This morning she was all hot and raving, so not wantin' anything

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to happen I called the doctor to her and he popped her off to the Metropolitan Hospital."

At the hospital, Wakering interviewed the almoner. He paid in cash for Jeannie to be moved from the ward to a cubicle and to be given every purchasable comfort. He was not asked his name, but was tactfully addressed as "Mr. Smith." To the hospital authorities, anonymous interest in patients of that class was not unfamiliar.

The next day, when his typist was going out to lunch, he asked her to buy him a dozen red carnations. He himself always lunched in the office on coffee and sandwiches. At three, after signing his letters, he announced that he was going out and would not return that day. The paper wrapping the carnations was wet and came unfolded when he picked up the flowers. On a side table were the "wretched posters," with photographs of Mrs. Hemmelman and her slandered dog. They were at least dry. He tore one in half and used it as a wrapper for the red carnations.

When he reached the hospital he was shown into the matron's office, where he was informed, through the formula designed to convey sympathy, that Jeannie was dead. There followed a brief explanation of the reason for the sudden collapse, which he did not hear.

Wakering walked out before the matron could raise the question of funeral expenses. He was not interested in Jeannie's funeral. He was not, indeed never had been, interested in Jeannie herself. But his personality was hopelessly entangled in the dream, of which Jeannie had provided the raw material.

He walked on, unconscious of his direction. The new, energizing dream had been violently torn from him. He would not be able to build where others had destroyed. No one would write of him as one of the great lovers of history. He would die as he had lived, a solicitor with a small practice — a man who had never had the virility to secure a woman for himself.

As he strode on, hot tears of frustration and self-pity dropped on the carnations that were to have been the banner of Jeannie Ruthen's regeneration. His stark tragedy overshadowed the universe, brought him a wide generosity so that he forgave everybody, particularly Cuthbert Bridstowe. This thing was too big for jealousy. To know all is to forgive all. He would tell Cuthbert what had happened and they would comfort each other.

His feet, no doubt directed by his subconscious, were taking him to Cuthbert Bridstowe. Daylight faded into dusk as he walked. The lights were up when he found himself staring at a photograph of the preposterous Mrs. Hemmelman and her dog pasted on the back of a car. Cuthbert Bridstowe's car. The garage man had just brought it round, and Bridstowe would turn up in a

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minute.

Wakering got inside the car, sat on the back seat. Jeannie herself had said poor old Cuthbert was not to blame. Their friendship could remain unchanged, could become exactly as it had been a dozen years ago. He could remember the summer evening he introduced Jeannie to Cuthbert. They had met by chance in Regent's Park. Jeannie was wearing one of those silky, summery frocks through which you could see how lovely she was — and a red carnation. He was glad he still had the carnations with him to show Cuthbert.

He was not aware that the car was in motion until it stopped with a jerk and the dome light flashed in his eyes.

"Get out. Don't try anything funny or I'll fire."

Cuthbert Bridstowe had wheeled round and was pointing a revolver.

"Cuthbert! It's me! Hugh Wakering. You can't have forgotten me!"

"Well, I'm damned! So it is!" Bridstowe put the revolver in his right-hand pocket. "But why the devil didn't you speak at once? I've only just seen you."

"I'm very sorry. I've had a shock and I'm afraid my mind wandered. Cuthbert, we must talk. I met Jeannie the day before yesterday."

"Jeannie? Oh, Jeannie Ruthen! I'd almost forgotten. You'd better come along to my club and tell me all about it. We can be there in ten minutes."

The way to the club lay through comparatively quiet streets. Wakering babbled on:

"D' you know, your office is almost opposite mine! And your friend Mrs. Hemmelman is a client. I kept out of your way because I thought you and Jeannie were married."

He had not meant to put it quite like that. It sounded a little aggressive, and he had meant to be forgiving and friendly.

"It's a long time ago, Hugh." Bridstowe slowed and stopped, feeling that the invitation to the club had been premature. He added formally: "How is she?"

"I met her coming out of Holloway, where she had served six months for theft."

"Hm! I'm sorry to hear that, but not surprised. I suppose I have a certain theoretical responsibility. What's the proposition, Hugh?"

"There isn't any proposition. She died this morning."

"She's dead! Then what the devil are you raking it all up for if you don't want me to do anything about it?" He switched off the dome light and pressed the starter.

"I didn't mention it in order to accuse you, but to assure you that I bear no ill-will." The heroic voice tuned in. "I was shocked by the tragedy of her wasted life — and I thought you might like to mourn with me."

"Rats! I know why you told me! Where shall I put you down?"

"Anywhere." His sense of inferior-

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ity to Cuthbert Bridstowe the seducer, who had scorned his forgiveness, was now inflated to the point of monomania.

Bridstowe was changing gear. Wakering leaned forward, took the revolver from Bridstowe's right hand pocket. Wakering has said that his intention was to kill himself, but this may be doubted. Certain it is that Wakering's left hand was still clutching the red carnation. A twitch brought their scent to his nostrils, reminded him of Jeannie's loveliness through the silky, summery frock in Regent's Park. He fired at Bridstowe's back.

The car was accelerating in third. He reached over Bridstowe, steered towards the curb, and switched off. Then he flopped back on the rear seat.

"Jeannie — Cuthbert — and now me!" He picked up the revolver, but decided it would be more manly to go to the gallows with a firm tread. The whole district must have heard that bang.

Now and again cars passed in both directions, but none stopped. He found himself thinking of a gravel pit near Sudchester. He had not seen it since he was a boy on holiday, but after Jeannie had gone away with Cuthbert he had often thought of it.

"I believe I always meant to kill Cuthbert and put his body in that gravel pit."

His finger hooked round the lever that secured the bucket seat next the driver. He slid the seat out of its grooves.

He got out by the offside door, walked round to the near side, pushed the bucket seat against the offside door. Assured that Bridstowe was dead, he pulled the body down so that it lay nearly full length on the floor, the head under the dashboard.

Then he started on his eighty mile drive, dawdling as much as he dared, for it was now only six o'clock.

It was a few minutes to ten and he had only some four miles to complete his journey when there came a spit from the carburetor, and another.

"Good Lord! Petrol!"

He stopped and took stock. The tank was empty. There was a lever on the tank, similar to that on his own car, controlling a small emergency supply. The makers claimed that it would be good for ten miles — which probably meant five. He would just about reach the gravel pit and stick there. Somehow, he must get more petrol before he could dump the body.

He was on the rise above Sudchester Junction. He coasted down to the junction, which was deserted and in darkness, on the chance of finding a parked lorry which he could tap.

There was nothing in the yard. The goods shed was the only hope.

With a pen-knife he pushed back the window of the booking office, climbed in and took a bunch of keys off its hook, one of which fitted the padlock of the goods shed. He entered and switched on the light.

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When he failed to find petrol, his first idea was to leave the corpse in the shed and get away.

But as soon as he spotted the pack-case, he grasped its immense possibilities. If he could get the corpse into the packing case it would probably stay there until the strike was settled. The case was secured with catches, easily opened. He had to stand astride the case to lift the metal, which he did not know to be a driving shaft. Then he went back to the car, used the reserve petrol to drive to the doors of the shed.

So far he had escaped bloodstains. He took off his light overcoat, then his suit, and worked in his underclothes. He transferred everything from Bridstowe's pockets to his own. The longer it took to identify the body the better, so he cut away all the clothing.

When he had at length contrived to shut the lid of the case on the corpse, he faced the fresh problem of the driving shaft. If he were to leave that gleaming metal to catch the eye of the first man who entered the shed he might just as well have left the corpse exposed. By the time he had cleaned his hands and face in a fire bucket he realized that he must take the shaft away with him.

The shaft weighed less than the corpse but was much more awkward to carry. It took him twenty minutes to carry it as many feet to the car and stow it as he had stowed the corpse. It was while he was pressing Bridstowe's clothing under the cushion of the back seat that he kicked the red carnations out of the car without noticing.

Having locked the goods shed and returned the key, he drove on to Sudchester village, knocked up the one garage and took on six gallons only, to avoid revealing that his tank was empty. Then four miles on to the gravel pit to dump the driving shaft where he had intended to dump Bridstowe.

The mouth of the gravel pit, which was thickly covered with brambles and weeds, reached almost to the roadway of the lane. He had dumped the clothing, had thrown the revolver after it and was about to start work on the driving shaft when the yokel came jog-trotting down the lane. With almost hysterical anxiety he begged to be driven to Sudchester to call the doctor to his wife. The safest course was to agree. Back in Sudchester, Wakering shrank from returning to the gravel pit. He would drive straight on and throw the shaft in the Thames at Whitchurch.

His encounter with the constable at Whitchurch made him realize that the shaft in itself was not dangerous to him — could not be, until the body was discovered. He could take it home and get rid of it the next night from his own car — after he had rested his already aching muscles.

From the garage near Kew Bridge, where he took another five gallons, it was but a couple of miles on to his house in Chiswick, a semi-detached building with a long narrow strip of

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garden in the rear, giving on to a side street; at the end of the garden was the garage. In seven minutes he had locked the driving shaft in his garage.

As he hoped that it would be at least a week before the hue and cry started, he did not abandon Bridstowe's car in a distant street, but drove it to the biggest garage he knew and, again giving Bridstowe's name, said he wanted to leave the car for a week. With two changes of taxi and an interval of walking, he made his way home.

Over breakfast he told his mother that he would have to go out after dinner that night and would be using the car.

During the morning, in the intervals of doing his normal work, he gave leisurely thought to the problem of a dumping ground for the shaft — something nearer home than the gravel pit.

He had a bad shock when the early evening papers revealed that the fact of the murder had been discovered.

He was home in time to hear the first broadcast — to learn that every policeman in the country, every Automobile Association patrolman, every garage man and a fair percentage of the public would be looking for a car with a bucket seat missing, carrying the driving shaft of the Arbee Steam Roller.

"I forgot to mention," he said to his mother, "that my engagement for tonight is off."

For the time being, the best place for the shaft was in his garage. Would it ever be safe to move it? He felt his first twinge of fear since his encounter with the Whitchurch constable.

The second twinge of fear came in the middle of the morning, when his typist announced that Detective-Sergeant Lambert wished to see him.

"Mrs. Hemmelman referred us to you Mr. Wakering," said Karslake's assistant. "She says she sent you a quire of posters for distribution. We want you to be good enough to give us the names of any applicants for the posters."

For a moment Wakering was puzzled. He glanced at the side table where the posters lay, and in doing so remembered he had used one as a wrapper for the carnations. He had forgotten all about the carnations — was no more alive to their clue value than Karslake himself. Anyhow, even if the shop assistant remembered him, she could not tell the police his name and address. The twinge of fear passed.

"I don't think there have been any applicants. I'll ask my typist to make sure." The typist knew of no applicants. Wakering had the wit to count the posters himself.

"One short of the quire," he announced. "Unless the office cleaner has taken one, I'm afraid I can't help you."

They could not, Wakering perceived, make anything out of that missing poster, because there could be no certainty that Mrs. Hemmel-

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man had not sent him one short.

On the following Saturday afternoon he locked himself in the garage. It had a thin flooring of cement, easily broken with a garden spade. Continuing his work over Sunday, he buried the shaft a foot deep. The following Saturday he cemented where he had dug. The work looked smeary and amateurish. The Saturday after that he cemented the whole floor, so that no given area caught the eye.

His assessment of his position agreed very closely with that of Superintendent Karslake. In his Appreciation for the Chief Commissioner, Karslake wrote: "Unexplained possession of the driving shaft would amount to absolute proof of guilt. Any clue, however non-evidential, that would indicate the murderer would therefore end the case. The premises of any suspected person must be searched instantly for the shaft. In the belief that the murderer was a social acquaintance, whom Bridstowe invited to enter his car, I am checking every contact with the deceased for several weeks preceding the murder. If this line fails I fear we shall have reached a dead end."

To Detective Inspector Rason of the Deparment of Dead Ends the documents were duly passed six weeks after the murder.

The Department would receive cases ranging from murder to lost dogs. It was a dead end case of theft from lorries that brought Rason to Fatty Spending, the man who had furtively welcomed Jeannie in the cellar bar. In the same cellar bar—but during licensed hours—Rason bought the other a pint of beer and a double gin to put in it. As Fatty was a very small scale operator, this was considerable hospitality.

"Fatty, I know you gave up working the lorries years ago. All I want from you is a friendly tip from one who has watched points. We think there's a girl in these West End jobs. Come to that, where's your little old pal Jeannie?"

"Ask me another, Mr. Rason. I've only set eyes on her once since she came out o' stir—and then not to speak to." As Rason registered unbelief, Fatty whined on: "She must've come straight here from stir, only she had a gentleman with her, so I no more than give her a quiet wink. And she left with the gent."

"*Gentleman,* Fatty? Are you trying to kid me Jeannie could get a gentleman?"

"Well her looks've gone, but she's still got a bit o' style. It's the truth I'm tellin' you, Mr. Rason. Ask Tim here, and he'll tell you the same."

"That's right, Mr. Rason," said the potman. "He was a gent all right. Quiet enough to look at, but plenty o' dough. Blimey! He'd bought her a whole large bunch o' red carnations, and I 'appen to know they cost five bob apiece at this time o' year."

"She hasn't been at her kip either, Mr. Rason, not these last six weeks

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she hasn't. I know, 'cause I've taken a stroll round there once or twice."

So far this promised to add up to the woman who was working with the lorry gang. Rason took the address of the "kip" and presently was interviewing the landlady. From the garrulous slut came a torrent of information in which the words "hospital," "Mrs. Hemmelman" and "the gentleman" kept bobbing up. Rason, like a good detective, kept her going while he tried to grab any relevant fact as it floated past.

"An' this Mrs. Hemmelman, Jeannie says, didn't half put the breeze up the wardresses. And the day they both came out, there was her posh car, with liveried footman an' all, waiting outside the stir for her."

"And this gentleman you spoke of — was he with Jeannie when she came back here?"

"No, but she must've come straight from him, because she had a whole lot o' flowers, an' if he didn't give 'em to her nobody else would have — lovely red carnations they was and must've cost a mint o' money at this time o' year. What was you askin'? No, he didn't come till the next day and as soon as I told him, he was off to the hospital — an' I couldn't help opening my eyes, as poor Jeannie has lost her looks — handsome feller he was too, though not my sort."

Rason escaped to the Metropolitan Hospital, to be told, after some delay, that Jeannie had died February 1st.

Before he had left the building, a messenger overtook him, with a request that he would see the almoner.

Apparently, certain expenses had been incurred in the attempt to save Jeannie's life and there had not been enough left of the original deposit to cover the funeral expenses. Could Detective Inspector Rason put them in touch with Jeannie's anonymous benefactor?

When Rason said he would do his best if he were given a full description, the almoner took him to the matron's office.

"He is very difficult to describe," said the matron. "I should say he is rather a handsome man, but without any feature you can pick on. I don't know what his concern was with the patient. When I told him she was dead he seemed to be stunned. He just stalked out of the room without even leaving the flowers he had brought for her."

"Red carnations," grinned Rason, who was sick of the flowers and Mrs. Hemmelman and "the gentleman."

"Yes. They *were* red carnations! And very expensive they are at this time of year. Does that mean that you know him?"

"No. But it means I may be able to find him for you," said Rason largely and bowed himself out.

So that was the end of the trail of the lorry gang. All he had learned was that red carnations were very expensive at this time of year. Funny a man should want to load them on to a woman like Jeannie! It was reasonable that a man might pay her

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hospital expenses if he wanted her to do some crooked work for him. But no crook would buy flowers for her — still less, before she was taken ill. Moreover, Fatty and his crowd, who at least knew a crook when they saw one, were emphatic that this man was a "gentleman," by which word they meant a mutt with money.

And this funny gentleman, with his funny red carnations, knew enough about Jeannie to meet her when she came out of prison — knew enough, too, not to give his name when he was befriending her at the hospital. If she were blackmailing him he would not have brought her those darned red carnations!

Red carnations, now he came to think of it, had taken up three pages of the Bridstowe murder report. Back in the office he re-read the three pages — learned that there was no evidence that they had belonged to the deceased.

"Suppose they belonged to the killer?"

He turned up the Whitchurch constable's original description of the man he had questioned on the bridge. It did not help much. But in the space headed "General Remarks" there was that irritating word again: *By speech and manner I would judge him a gentleman.*

"So if the carnations belonged to the killer, we have two funny gentlemen behaving in a crazy way with red carnations — and on the same day! One gentleman buys them for a Jeannie, which is crazy, and the other gentleman buys 'em for the man he's going to bump off. *Phew!*"

He took a taxi to Holloway Prison, where he learned that no friend had called at the prison to meet Jeannie Ruthen on her discharge. When he came out, there was no taxi in sight — which is what Karslake calls "Rason's luck," because on the way to the 'bus stop he saw the florist's and walked in.

Yes, the girl remembered a very odd couple who had bought a dozen red carnations. The gentleman was what you might call good looking, but the woman wasn't; and you could see she had just come out of prison, because she had the canvas bag they always give them when they have no luggage.

So the gentleman had met her outside the prison, not in the waiting room! Outside the prison was Mrs. Hemmelman's chauffeur, even if there were no "liveried footmen."

"Well, the only man I noticed standing about," said the chauffeur, "was Mrs. Hemmelman's solicitor, Mr. Wakering. And suddenly he darted away after some woman who had come out of the prison. And he didn't come back, either. And madam didn't half lead off when I told her he had been and gone, as she wanted him to help her pitch in to the Lady Governor."

Rason went back to the Metropolitan Hospital. The matron refused to leave the hospital, as she was on duty. But she consented to sit in a police car outside Wakering's office

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at ten the next morning. As soon as she identified him Rason thanked her and sent her back. From a doorway, where he had been posted, emerged the constable from Whitchurch.

"That was the man I saw on Whitchurch bridge, sir."

"Good! Report back right away to Superintendent Karslake and say I'll be along in a few minutes," ordered Rason. He lit a cigarette and loitered long enough to allow Wakering to settle himself in his office.

"There's another of those detectives wants to see you, Mr. Wakering. He says he won't keep you more than a few minutes." The typist glanced at a card. "Detective Inspector Rason."

Wakering felt a moment's unease, but no fear. Some more about that wretched poster, he supposed. If there had been anything to link him with Bridstowe, the police would have found it weeks ago.

He nodded and a moment later Rason came in under his customary mask of fatuous breeziness.

"Sorry to interrupt you in the middle of your mail, Mr. Wakering. I've got your name down as having helped us before over those dog posters of Mrs. Himmelman's. I'm on the same case — same sort of check-up, only it's names this time." He opened a large notebook. "Man: Rothenstein, alias Ablaz, slight foreign accent. Calls on City solicitors —"

"He never called on me," interrupted Wakering, now wholly at ease.

"Thank you!" Rason ticked it off in the notebook. "Next. Woman: Jeannie Ruthen, alias Jeannie Spendling, alias Jeannie Carmichael . . . ."

Wakering felt the blood sing in his ears, but he kept a tight hold in his manner.

"It doesn't ring a bell. Have a cigarette before you finish the list."

"Thanks! Half a minute, I'll just tick this off or we shall get muddled. You have no knowledge of the woman, Jeannie Ruthen? Thank you. Don't bother, I have a match. I'm afraid I've let you in for a spot o' bother there, Mr. Wakering. The fact is, this woman died some weeks ago in the Metropolitan Hospital. We had traced a very thin line between her and Bridstowe, which was rather surprising, because she was a — you know! When she was dying they asked her — using other words, I suppose — who was going to pay for her funeral and she said 'Mr. Wakering', and then conked out. When the matron told me this, I happened to remember your name was on our list as a City solicitor who had helped over that dog poster, and I told her so. I fancy she'll be dropping in on you in the hope of collecting the funeral expenses."

"Hm! Well, thank you for warning me anyhow, Inspector. I'll tell my typist to explain, if the matron does come here."

"Right!" Rason got up. "If you can leave my name out of it I'll be

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obliged, because I ought to have kept my trap shut. Good morning, Mr. Wakering, and thanks very much."

There was fear now, but no panic. Again, Wakering assessed his position. If that matron made it her business to see him she would identify him. That would expose his lie, but would still leave no logical connection between himself and Bridstowe. But the police were not tied by logic. If they had any suspicion at all, logic or not, they might produce that constable from Whitchurch. And that would be dangerous — but only fatal if he were found in possession of the shaft. Without the shaft, the constable's identification would fail with the jury, since the man had only seen him once, and in the dark.

He rang his mother and said that he was taking the day off to do some work on the car and would be home in an hour. Then he told his typist that his mother had been taken ill and that he would not return until the morrow.

Nearly seven weeks since he had killed Bridstowe! In that time the public would have forgotten about the car with the bucket seat missing, carrying a driving shaft. But would the police and the patrol men?

There was nothing for it but to take the risk of dumping the shaft after dark — anywhere — in one of the parks, if he could think of nothing better. He would have to start digging in the garage at once. As soon as he reached home he locked himself in the garage and again set about breaking the thin cement with a garden spade.

"There you are, sir!" said Rason who, with Karslake, was in the side street at the bottom of Wakering's garden. "You can hear him digging. I knew if he'd still got the shaft he'd fish it out, provided we scared him — and provided we let him think he still had a chance to get rid of it."

Fearing suicide, they waited until Wakering opened the door to let himself out for lunch and a rest.

"Anything to say, Wakering, before we finish digging up that driving shaft?"

"No statement," answered Wakering.

But he eventually made one in the witness box. The jury believed his tale about the red carnations, especially as he had entered the car without a lethal weapon. He was released for good behavior when he had served seven of the ten years to which he was sentenced for manslaughter.

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